

*Why did Canada join the consensus decision
on the East Asian applications for
observership at the 2013 Arctic Council
meeting in Kiruna?*

A case study

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Summary

In this thesis, I consider the following research question: *Why did Canada join the consensus decision on the East Asian applications for observership at the 2013 Arctic Council meeting in Kiruna?*

Canada's consent to the admission of the East Asian states - China, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea – as observers in the Arctic Council is curious, for Canada under Harper's Conservative Party – in power since 2006 - has traditionally been perceived as reluctant to “open up” the Council to powerful non-Arctic actors.

In this qualitative study, I seek to answer my research question by considering two levels of analysis: Canada's domestic politics and Canada's position in the international circumpolar relations and the Arctic Council. At each of these levels of analysis, I look at certain interests and institutions and how they may be related to the incident of Canada's Arctic foreign policy at Kiruna.

I find that the combination of new observership criteria regulating the admission and role of observers in the Arctic Council, Canada's positive revaluation of the value of circumpolar multilateralism, and economic considerations on the involvement of East Asian countries in the development of Canada's North, were the main causes behind Canada's decision on the admission of the East Asian states as observers in the Arctic Council.

Foreword

Working on this thesis has been challenging, but I am grateful to have accumulated knowledge about a topic that I am strongly passionate about, and which I am sure will continue to motivate me well beyond the completion of this work.

I would like to thank my supervisor Olav Schram Stokke for providing me with extremely useful feedback throughout the entire process of this thesis.

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My fellow students at the Master's programme in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Oslo should also be thanked for the great time spent together over the past two years.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my parents and sister for always having a wise word when I needed it most (at least my parents).

All inaccuracies remain my own.

Dario Iulianella

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1 Introduction and overview

1.1 Background

The Arctic¹ has long been an area of moderate international significance. However, attention to the region is increasing since climate change has opened up economic possibilities and non-arctic States have shown growing interest in Arctic issues.

Canada is the world's second largest country after Russia, with over 40 percent of territory and 160 000 km of coastline located in the Arctic. Within the Canadian federal state, the three territories of Northwest Territories (NWT), Nunavut (NWT), and Yukon are the political definition of "Canada's Arctic", with a population of just 115 000, that is, 32 per cent of Canadians. Of these, more than half are Indigenous people, namely Inuit, Métis, and First Nations (House of Commons Canada 2013: 2)

Canada's Conservative government, led by Stephen Harper, assumed office in February 2006 defeating the previous administration under the Liberals of Paul Martin, and has been in office since then. Electoral support for Harper has been confirmed in the federal general elections in 2008 and 2011, when the Conservatives finally obtained a majority government.

Canada's Arctic policy is articulated around a number of official documents issued throughout time since 2006: "Canada's Northern Strategy (2009), the "Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy" (2010), the "Achievements under Canada's Northern Strategy 2007- 2011"(2011), and "Development for the People of the North: The Arctic Council Program during Canada's Chairmanship 2013- 2015" (2013).

Internationally, Canada is one of the eight member states of the Arctic Council (AC), a high-level forum established in 1996 with the signing of Ottawa Declaration and addressing Arctic issues, and Canada has taken on the chairmanship of the Council for

¹ "Arctic" will be intended here as indicating the northernmost region of the world, including the Arctic Ocean and sections of the eight Arctic states: Canada, the United States (Alaska), Denmark (Greenland and the Faroe Islands), the Russian Federation, Sweden, Finland, Norway and Iceland.

the term 2013-2015. The Arctic Council comprises both member states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russia Federation, Sweden and the U.S.) and Permanent Participants (PPs), representing the Arctic Indigenous population. Of the eight PPs, three organizations have Canadian representation, namely the Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC), the Gwich'in Council International (GCI), and the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC). The activities of the Council are carried out by six working groups (WGs).²

Observer status in the Arctic Council is open to non-Arctic states, inter-governmental and inter-parliamentary organizations, and non-governmental organizations. By the mid-2000s, East Asian countries, among others, started to seek observership in the Council. At the Kiruna Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in May 2013 China, Japan, South Korea and Singapore were eventually admitted as observers.

Among the Arctic Council member states, Canada, together with Russia, has traditionally been perceived as the most wary of an “internationalization” of the Council. Ultimately, however, Canada contributed to the consensus decision on the East Asian observers at Kiruna.

1.2 Research question

In light of the above, this thesis will consider the following research question: *Why did Canada join the consensus decision on the East Asian applications for observership at the 2013 Arctic Council meeting in Kiruna?*

I will answer this research question by focusing my analysis on interests and institutions acting at both the domestic level of internal Canadian politics as well as Arctic international relations.

² More general information on the Arctic Council can be found at: arcticcouncil.org.

1.3 The contribution of this thesis

The last five years have seen a great increase in the literature concerned with the study of the East Asian engagement in the Arctic.

On the one hand, this trend builds on the scientific research – widely covered by the media, and often blown out of proportions – that more insistently has highlighted the economic possibilities connected to the fast pace at which the Arctic ice cap is melting. Accordingly, a considerable amount of publications discuss the future security and economic implications of an ice-free Arctic, applying the traditional dilemma between power confrontation and cooperation to the Arctic states.³

On the other hand, initiatives from East Asian states towards the Arctic have attracted large attention, and much ado has followed the 2013 Arctic Council observership status to the East Asian applicants at Kiruna. The first major article on China in the Arctic was produced in 2010 (Jakobson 2010) and a great number of publications on the issue (although mostly limited to China) have followed suit since then.⁴

This thesis stands out from the augmented interest in the Arctic, both generally and from the East Asian states, and takes a clear position about the dilemma of “cooperation vs. confrontation” in the Arctic, accepting that the Arctic Council is a great example of international cooperation.

Firstly, then, where my research aims at contributing to is the field studying the consequences of the “globalization” of the Arctic on the Arctic Council, originally born as a regional organization. This literature deals with both broad issues of governance and with the specific case of non-Arctic states seeking observership in the Council.⁵

Secondly, this thesis hopes to shed light on the specific theme of Canada’s Arctic policy and the involvement of observers, with particular attention to the East Asian

³ See for example: Gerhardt, Hannes, et al. (2010); Young (2009).

⁴ See for example: Bennett (2014); Stokke (2011); Wegge (2014).

⁵ See for example: Koivurova (2010); Stokke (2010); Young (2012).

countries. While there is a rising number of publications treating Canada's Arctic strategy and East Asian states,⁶ I have found that this is largely "out-dated", in the sense it does not take into account the May 2013 Arctic Council meeting that granted observer status to the East Asian countries. Accordingly, no study – to my knowledge – has tried to explain systematically the motives behind Canada's favourable vote for the East Asian applicants in the way that has been done, for example, with the Nordic countries (Lunde 2014) and Russia (Røseth 2014).

Related to this, by linking domestic explanations to the analysis of Canada's foreign policy decision at Kiruna, I provide empirical substantiation to Putnam's and Milner's models of a "two-level game" between domestic and international politics and to the general theoretical approach that combines the two levels of analysis. I also challenge the common perception according to which Canada would traditionally be opposed to admitting new observer states in the Arctic Council and was thus pressured into accepting the East Asian applications at Kiruna (Keil 2011; Lunde 2014; Pulkinnen 2013). In fact, I find that Canada's decision may have been coherent with Canada's general trend of Arctic policy.

Lastly, I contribute to the literature that has considered Harper's domestic politics on the Arctic, and I also aim at putting some order in the debate about the complex institutional phenomenon of devolution in Canada's North.

1.4 Methods

As for the research design adopted for this paper, I conduct a qualitative case study, in that I focus on one specific incident of Canada's Arctic foreign policy. My research has tried to be as exhaustive as possible by looking at both domestic and international drivers behind the Canadian decision at the Arctic Council meeting in Kiruna.

Within the case study design, I build on process tracing. Process tracing is "a style of analysis used to reconstruct a causal process that has occurred within a single case"

⁶ See for example: Lackenbauer and Manicom (2013a, b); Lasserre (2010).

(Gerring 2006: 216); that is, “a procedure for identifying steps in a causal process leading to the outcome of a given dependent variable of a particular case in a particular historical context” (George & Bennet 1997: 176). In the case of my thesis, the dependent variable is Canada’s position on the East Asian observership applications, the independent variables being identified both at the Canadian domestic and the Arctic international levels.

For this paper, process tracing is particularly appropriate, as I try to trace back the determinate outcome of Canada’s foreign policy by collecting evidence at different levels of analysis. As we shall see, my research follows the specified causal process over time. The “chronological element” is fundamental in pinpointing the causal steps, especially when in the timeline of events there appears to be an incoherence between a certain occurrence and its temporal premises. It is this very break that spurs my causal investigation.

For instance, as the analysis in the next chapters will show, in the analysis of Canada’s domestic politics I have found a significant gap between Harper’s blustering public rhetoric on the Arctic and the rather compromising tones that emerge from his private talks on the Arctic in the same period. Similarly, at the international level, I focus, among other issues, on the seeming contradiction between Canada’s “exclusive” example of leadership on occasion of the Chelsea meeting of the Arctic five costal states in 2010 and Canada’s multilateral move in favour of the new applicants for observer status at Kiruna in 2013.

The pieces of evidence that come in use during my research are, as Gerring puts it when describing the features of process tracing, “relevant to the central argument, but they do not comprise observations in a larger sample” (Gerring 2006: 178). As for the data materials, primary importance is given to official documents and statements from the Canadian government. However, as Vennesson points out, one of the main challenges of process tracing when applied to the study of foreign policy decision rests in the availability of accurate empirical sources (Vennesson 2008: 237). Official documents and statements, especially in the case of sensitive issues like Canada’s

perception of East Asian interests in the Arctic, are likely to be rather cautious and thus of limited benefit for research. Therefore, I rely on the accessory use of news clippings, analyses of scholars and commentators of domestic and international politics, and interviews with officials and experts of Arctic issues.

I also reference governmental information, originally not intended for public use, leaked in 2009-2010 and published by WikiLeaks. The literature and the media have made extensive use of the cables, and their authenticity seems to be uncontested. While Lasserre et al. (2012: 55) report that government officials refused to comment on them, Pedersen writes that he was met with no objection (Pedersen 2012: 146). Finally, my participation to three high-level conferences on Arctic issues (“The Trans-Arctic Agenda” and the “Arctic Circle 2014” in Reykjavik in October 2014, and “The High North Dialogue” in Bodø in March 2015) proved valuable to my research.

With regards to interviews, I knew from the very beginning of my project that they would not constitute my main data source. Not only is the subject delicate, but also, and most importantly, the Arctic Council meeting at Kiruna was held behind closed doors. Those who had tried before me, with longer time and better resources at their dispenses, concluded that “no SAO⁷ would relate the exact content of what was discussed” (Willis & Depledge 2015: 28). Moreover, and specifically for Canada, I was warned that Canadian officials need authorization from Ottawa before they can release interviews for material that will be published or printed.

In the past months, I have conducted a number of semi-structured interviews. When interviews did not happen via email, I decided not to tape the respondents. At least four points should be considered when pondering whether to tape an interview or not:

⁷ “Ministers are generally very busy people, so the actual task of managing the Arctic Council has fallen to what are known as “Senior Arctic Officials” or SAOs. SAOs are typically higher ranking diplomats from Foreign Ministries and State Departments and meet 2-3 times a year in the period between the biannual Ministerials” (Exener-Pirot 2014a).

- (1) the kind of research topic, (2) the willingness of the respondents to be recorded, (3) the interviewer's familiarity with taping interviews, and (4) the general advantages and drawbacks of the technique (Humphrey & Lee 2004: 361).

As for my research, points (3) and (4) are particularly relevant.

First of all, the setting of the interviews in almost all cases was very informal and relaxed ("in front of a cup of coffee"), which made me feel that a recorder on the table would be out of place. With the exception of phone interviews, I did not take extensive notes during the interviews, but just scribbled down a few keywords (my experience is that summarizing an interview while it is being conducted often results in frantic writing by the interviewer). Instead, I spelled out the main points raised by the respondents during the meetings as soon as I had the chance, and in any case not more than five minutes after the interview was concluded. I made sure my notes were accurate and that the risk of misinterpretation of information was minimized: the interviews were seldom longer than thirty minutes, which made it easy to recollect the evidences suggested by the interviewees. I also checked with my informants before quoting them on certain points.

Second of all, manually recording data saves considerable resources (with regards to money and time, for example) for it skips the tedious step of transcription by providing an edited written source ready to be used as soon as the interview is over. Manually recording data – this again being my case – may also be appropriate if the researcher is more interested in learning about facts than registering how respondents reacted to them (Weiss 1995: 55).

In the course of this thesis, respondents will be referred to by name. Where this is not the case, respondents have explicitly requested to be anonymized. Appendix 1 contains a complete list of the respondents.

1.5 Thesis outline

This thesis consists of six chapters, the first one being this introduction and overview. Chapter 2 will present the theoretical model upon which I build the analysis in chapter 3, 4 and 5. Chapter 3 analyses the interests at the level of Canada's domestic politics and investigates the link between them and Canada's position at Kiruna. Chapter 4 considers the role of domestic institutions – namely devolution in Canada's North – in shaping Canada's foreign policy at Kiruna. Chapter 5 considers both interests and institutions at the level of circumpolar politics. Chapter 6 provides a summary of the findings.

2 Making foreign policy: a game of domestic and international politics

This chapter will present the theoretical model upon which I base my analysis. Section 2.1 provides an introduction of the theoretical framework, while in sections from 2.2 to 2.5 I apply the model to the case at study. Section 2.6 summarizes the theoretical model and its application.

2.1 Interests and institutions

Canada's consent to the admission of the East Asia observers at the 2013 Arctic Council meeting in Kiruna falls within the country's foreign policy decision-making. A better understanding of the drivers behind Canada's stand at Kiruna may be obtained by including components of domestic politics into the analysis. While at the international level I retain the assumption of states as unitary actors, at the domestic level my theoretical model opens up the "black box" of the state, and in this it builds on Putnam (1988) and Milner (1997), and, more generally, on the tradition that combines international and domestic politics in the analysis of foreign policy decision-making.

Putnam speaks of "two-level games" (Putnam 1988: 459): when sitting down at the table of international negotiations, statesmen strive to strike a balance between international and domestic politics. On the one hand, statesmen aim at maximizing the country's international position amidst the limitations posed by foreign players (Putnam 1988: 434). On the other hand, statesmen seek to accommodate the preferences of domestic actors in order to gain electors' supports (Putnam 1988: 434). Accordingly, the simultaneous evaluation of international and domestic factors makes the executives "Janus-faced" (Evans et al. 1993: 15), and it follows that, in the study of a particular incident of foreign policy, ignoring either of the two dimensions, that is, simplifying the interplay between national and international politics, risks glossing over significant sides of research.

“Unlike state-centric theories, the two level approach recognized the inevitability of domestic conflict about what the “national interest” requires. The two-level approach recognizes that central decision-makers strive to reconcile domestic and international imperatives simultaneously” (Putnam 1988: 460).

Putnam breaks the process of international cooperation down into two phases: the “bargaining phase” (level I), in which statesmen act on the international stage, and the ratification phase (level II), in which statesmen deal with the domestic responses on certain issues of foreign policy (Putnam 1988: 437).

According to Putnam, three factors shape a country’s foreign policy, and specifically the possibilities, or “win-sets” (Putnam 1988: 442), that an international agreement will be ratified. In other words, Putnam argues that in democracy the scale of win-sets is determined by interactions at level II rather than level I (Putnam 1988: 437).

Putnam numbers:

- Level II preferences and coalitions;
- Level II institutions;
- Level I negotiators’ strategies (Putnam 1988: 442).

Milner (1997) builds on Putnam and adopts a similar two-level approach. However, Milner recurs to a more detailed analysis of the interests of national actors and of the relationships between them, using the concepts of interests of the executives, legislatures and societal groups, institutions, information.

As we shall see, my model will apply Putnam’s distinction between preferences and institutions not only at the domestic level of the analysis (level II) but also at the international level of the analysis (level I).

Putnam’s and Milner’s models are preoccupied with specific bargaining situations that, at both the domestic and the international levels, may influence the possibilities of successful international agreements, and in this they are very detailed. These

elaborations are largely beyond the scope of this thesis, which is interested in pointing out the existence of meaningful interactions between level II and I in the case of Canada's Arctic foreign policy as expressed at the Kiruna meeting. Importantly, I consider the admission of the East Asian observers at Kiruna as a case of international bargaining. After all, the decision on new observers was the outcome of discussions between the Arctic Council member states and was formalized with the adoption of the Kiruna declaration. Moreover, since it is not directly relevant to my model, I will not take into account the concept of information as conceived by Milner, and I will limit the national actors to executives and interest groups.

At the international level of the analysis, the theoretical foundation will be given by neoliberal institutionalism, in the formulation of one of its leading proponents, Robert Keohane. Neoliberal institutionalism shares a number of assumptions with the traditional rival theory of neorealism. Firstly, they are both structural theories in that they recognize the dimension of power relations in the international system. Secondly, they both start off by assuming that states, as unitary actors, will behave rationally and on the basis of their own self-interests. Thirdly, they see the international system as informed by overarching anarchy, that is, the absence of a superior authority.

Given these premises, Axelrod and Keohane resolve that, under neoliberal institutionalism, value-maximizing states will nonetheless opt for international cooperation, the underlying definition of cooperation being a situation that contains "a mixture of conflicting and complementary interests" (Axelrod & Keohane 1985: 226). In this, cooperation implies "mutual adjustment" and it is thus not equivalent to harmony, which describes perfect identity of interests among players (Axelrod & Keohane 1985: 226).

According to Keohane, states "develop institutions and practices that will enable them to cooperate more efficiently without renouncing the pursuit of self-interest" (Keohane 1984: 30).

Therefore, while neoliberal institutionalism finds common ground with neorealism on treating states as unitary and rational actors, it does not dismiss possibilities for

international cooperation and international institutions. As a consequence, I find that neoliberal institutionalism fits the international state of affairs of Arctic politics that I consider here, and for the very combination of unilateral and cooperative initiatives at the heart of neoliberal institutionalism.

Elaborating on the factors that may promote international cooperation among states in spite of the anarchy and the primacy of self-interests, Axelrod and Keohane number:

- The mutuality of interests (states recognize the benefits that stem from cooperating are greater than those that they would obtain solely by competing);
- The “shadow of the future” (the extent to which states value future payoffs from further cooperation);
- The numbers of players (states realize that, as the number of players increases, so does the risk that interactions among actors will be broken down into subordinate games with smaller number of players) (Axelrod & Keohane 1985: 235).

Finally, understanding international relations as a system of interconnection and interdependence, neoliberal institutionalism rejects the neorealist primacy of concerns about balance of power and security, prioritizing instead long-term mutual absolute gains and a broader set of benefits than just strategic power (Marsden & Savigny 2011 51-55).

Having presented the general theoretical framework, one point is worth clarification. The spectrum of interests and institutions at the domestic and international levels concerning Canada’s Arctic policy is obviously larger than the one I will be focusing upon in the course of my analysis, and that I will present in the following sections of this chapter.

2.2 Interests⁸ at the domestic level: the Arctic in Harper's re-election strategies

At the domestic level, Putnam looks at the influence that “politics” has on the elaboration of foreign policy (Putnam 1988: 432). Politics is “parties, social classes, interest groups (both economic and noneconomic), legislators, and even public opinions and elections, not simply executive officials and institutional arrangements” (Putnam 1988: 432). The overall assumption is that re-election is the ultimate goal of the executive power (Milner 1997: 34). In order to secure their continuation in office, political leaders will thus be attentive to the preferences of the electorate and the mobilization of influential interest groups around certain issues of foreign policy. The tactics of the executives may look, for example, at the politicization of the issues at stake and the dimension of the “isolationist forces” that resist international agreements (Putnam 1988: 442).

Since Harper took office in 2006, the Canadian Arctic has gained prominence in the country's domestic politics, and strong emphasis on Canada's sovereignty in the region has been recurrent in Harper's campaigns for the federal general elections. This seems to be part of a broader strategy of the Conservatives for recasting Canada's national identity as a “product of the Conservatives” after that, for decades, and quite intriguingly, nationalism had gone hand in hand with the Liberal party (Wells 2013). The Arctic, and specifically in Harper's preferred interpretation of military sovereignty in the region, had been left largely untouched by the Liberals before the Conservatives took office, and has now become one of Harper's favoured trademarks of domestic politics.

I argue that this is an example of “issue ownership”. The issue ownership theory of voting looks at both candidates and voters (Petrocik 1996). On the one hand, parties will try to gain electoral support by building their campaigns around matters on which they have (or at least feel to have) exclusive competence (Petrocik 1996: 826).

⁸ I use here Milner's (1997) taxonomy of “interests”, while Putnam (1988) speaks more often of “preferences”.

“A candidate’s campaign can be understood as a “marketing” effort: the goal is to achieve a strategic advantage by making problems which reflect owned issues the programmatic meaning of the elections and the criteria by which voters make their choice” (Petrocik 1996: 828).

On the other hand, voters will reward the party that proves to have the greatest ownership, that is, expertise over a specific issue (Petrocik 1996: 830).

In an effort to refine the theory, Bélanger and Meguid (2008) have added the variable of “issue salience” and have considered that, other than specific considerations of issue ownership, the preferences of the electorate will also depend on how salient the voters perceive the political issue at stake. As they put it:

“Why should knowing that the Democrats (or Labour in Britain, or the Liberals in Canada) are the owner of the health care issue matter for an individual's vote if she thinks that health care is an irrelevant issue?” (Bélanger & Meguid 2008: 480).

From the one hand, then, Harper has embraced the Arctic with unique determination and taken the region under his cabinet’s “ownership”, turning it into a platform to condemn the Liberals supposed inaction on the Arctic file. From the other hand, Canada’s Arctic sovereignty is a salient theme: Canada’s electorate is deeply attached to its Arctic and gets touchy whenever its sovereignty is called into question.

More clearly until 2010, hard politics talks on the militarization of the Arctic were the preeminent language of Harper’s cabinet. To some extent, this must have resonated with the electorate, considering that in 2011 Harper’s coalition was finally granted a majority government, winning also in the two Arctic federal districts of Yukon and Nunavut. However, while Harper’s tough talks on the Arctic and the recurring alarmism on alleged external threats to Canada’s sovereignty in the North have heated up the Arctic in the domestic political debate, military investments in the region have been rather modest, and there is general consensus (Byers 2013b; Den Tandt 2013a) that Harper has not lived up to his much publicized commitments.

Interestingly, in the last few years, the focus on the Arctic has been re-adjusted and the government has largely abandoned its more bellicose tones on the Arctic and the motto of “use it or lose it” for the North (Campbell 2012). Instead, interest for the economic possibilities connected to the development of natural resources in Canada’s Arctic, where the involvement of East Asian partners may possibly play a great role, has climbed up the government’s agenda for the North.

It is therefore evident to many (Campbell 2012; Ibbitson 2011; Lackenbauer 2013a) how Harper’s realpolitik on the Arctic does not tell the whole story about Canada’s domestic approach.

“This federal government employs a two track policy in the Arctic: noisy confrontation and quiet co-operation. The latter track is the real policy, but it doesn’t profit the Prime Minister to acknowledge it much” (Ibbitson 2011).

Firstly, economic development is a goal for executives in itself. Milner elaborates on the “office seeking” strategies of political actors and argues that success in the continuation of offices is often connected to the economic prosperity of the country: when faced with poor economic performances, the electorate is more likely to withdraw their support for the ruling coalition (Milner 1997: 35). In the case of Harper’s Conservatives, resource-based development in Canada’s North is part of their broader economic plans for the country that encourage development and growth through the extensive extraction of natural resources.

Secondly, the theme of resource development for the North comes closer to the interests of Canada’s Northerners (Den Tandt 2013a). Milner writes that “although ultimately voters elect political leaders [...], special interest can be an enormous help to leaders [in that] they can produce contributions, votes, media attention, and so on” (Milner 1997: 35). Also, Milner links the role of interest groups and international cooperation by arguing that, when influential societal groups take a certain position on an issue of foreign policy, executives may correct the direction accordingly in order to meet with their approval (Milner 1997: 61). As such, interest groups can have a critical influence on the possibilities for international cooperation (Milner 1997: 61).

This is particularly telling with regards to Canada's northern population, which, unlike the south of the country, includes a significant percentage of Aboriginal peoples. Accounting for just three electoral seats, Canada's northern territories do not constitute an important electoral target per se. And yet, failure to fill the endemic gap between the conditions of Aboriginal citizens and the rest of the population has been a persistent criticism of Harper's government both at home and abroad. The issue has even bigger resonance considering that Canada's recent political culture for the North – unique among the Arctic states – has placed a premium on the involvement of Northerners, due to both a genuine alignment between executives and Northerners, and the fact that in several cases the Constitution explicitly requires it (Exner-Pirot 2014a: 4). In 2012 Canada set a precedent by appointing an Indigenous resident, Leona Aglukkaq, as Canada's Chair of the Arctic Council, and Canada's Council agenda is centred on "Development for the people of the North" (Development for the People of the North 2013). Harper has repeated that the government is "committed to ensuring that Northerners benefit from the tremendous natural resource reserves that are found in their region" (Office of the Prime Minister, Canada 2012a), and northern leaders, for their part, have praised the increased weight on the theme of development (Wingrowe 2013).

Finally, the higher stress placed on development may resonate the government's more general electoral concerns that, while the big-ticket commitments for Arctic defense will not be delivered in time for the general federal elections, economic development for the North provides new motives for the Conservatives' political program (Den Tandt 2013a).

The theme of this section, which will be largely elaborated on in chapter 3, has introduced the state of play of the interests between the Canadian domestic actors that I focus upon. The next section will look at domestic institutions.

2.3 Institutions at the domestic level: devolution under Harper's economic plans for the Arctic

Both Putnam and Milner question how domestic institutions influence the formation of a country's foreign policy. "Domestic political institutions determine how power over decision making is allocated among national actors. How power is shared affects whose preferences are most likely to dominate policy making" (Milner 1997: 17).

Putnam and Milner are mostly interested in those institutional patterns that determine the relationship between the executive and the legislature and condition the ratification of international agreements. Milner discusses, for example, how five major legislative power sources (namely: agenda setting, amendment, ratification or veto, referendum, and side payments) shape the likelihood of international cooperation (Milner 1997: 19).

I relax Milner's conceptualization in two ways. On the one side, and still with regards to domestic interests, I consider the electoral response to Harper's Arctic policies as an example of domestic threshold for ratification. Although the Canadian political system does not formally require electoral approval of initiatives of foreign policy, there are, as I have presented in the former section, obvious costs for the government in terms of votes associated with a certain decision of Arctic foreign policy over another. On the other side, in investigating the extent to which Canada's domestic institutions are related to Canada's stand on the East Asian observers in the Arctic Council, I do not focus on an institutional procedure of ratification, but rather on devolution, possibly the most relevant institutional phenomenon underway in Canada's North.

Over the last few years, devolution has taken a great move forward in Northern Canada. Devolution indicates "the transfer of province-like responsibilities from the federal government to the territories" (Canada's Northern Strategy 2009: 28). Up until recently, the transfer of power from Ottawa has concerned only regional affairs such as education, healthcare and social services, competences over land and resource management being left to the federal government. This has been changing since 2003, when Yukon signed a devolution agreement on lands and resource management.

Considering that the biggest domestic contributions to Canada from an East Asian-Arctic engagement may come in the form of investments in resource development projects in the North, I investigate the role that devolution plays. After all, devolution can facilitate investments in the region to the extent that it clarifies who the stakeholders are, and Harper has shown lately that developing the resource potential of the North is a priority of his government.

Having considered the domestic institutional process of devolution in Canada's North, which will be the main theme of chapter 4, I will now take into account the interests at the international level.

2.4 Interests at the international level: the value of circumpolar cooperation for Harper's Canada

As neoliberal institutionalism points to some ways that institutions can serve the interests of member states, I consider the positive response to the observership applications from non-Arctic countries at Kiruna as a similar case, since the admission of the East Asian applicants was foremost a strategic move from the Arctic Council member states (Pulkkinen 2013).

From the one side, East Asian countries may bring considerable economic contributions and scientific expertise to the work of the Arctic Council (Manicom & Lackenbauer 2013b: 5).

From the other side, keeping East Asia out would put the political clout of the Council at stake. In this sense, opening the Arctic Council to powerful non-Arctic players may deter the establishment of competing forums for the discussion of Arctic issues (Manicom & Lackenbauer 2013: 6; Pulkkinen 2013: 5).

The inspiration of neoliberal institutionalism behind the entry of East Asian observers is thus evident:

“Even though Arctic politics is driven by an economic and cooperative logic, the Arctic States need to protect their own strategic interests while at the same time keep the region peaceful and stable. By sending an openhearted signal and recognizing [the East Asian] interests, the Arctic Council took on a cooperative and constructive while at the same time a controlling strategy” (Pulkkinen 2013: 6).

The Nordic countries championed the opening of the Council to new observers and acted as “pragmatic institutionalists with a realist flair” (Lunde 2014: 43), and an analysis of Russia’s Arctic Foreign Policy (Røseth 2014) points to the conclusion that Russia’s endorsement of the Chinese application for permanent observership resounds “tactical” calculations (Røseth 2014). In both cases, the definition of “power” is wide and comprises, among others, economic and scientific advantages.

Analogous consideration may apply to Canada. As early as 2008, the Canadian professor and Arctic expert Griffiths encouraged Canada to “rise to the occasion in the Arctic” (Griffiths 2008: 25). Putting it in resonant neoliberal institutionalist terms, Griffiths underlined the linkages between Canada’s national interests and a strategy of cooperative stewardship in the Arctic, including the admission of relevant non-Arctic stakeholders in the governance of the region as observers within the Council (Griffiths 2008: 25).

“The opening Arctic presents Canada with a unique opportunity for a fresh start. Under a strategy of [cooperative] stewardship the Arctic would bring us new advantage in our trade, political and military relations with major powers of the world” (Griffiths 2008: 25).

In this, Griffiths drew attention to the emerging positive trend in Canada’s Arctic foreign policy that, next to domestic possession anxieties over the Arctic and the narrative of “use it or lose it”, seemed to bring renewed attention to the multilateral significance of the Arctic Council. In this sense, while Harper eliminated the position of Circumpolar Ambassador right after taking office (Huebert 2009: 35) and, until 2008, Canada’s consistency in international politics had suffered from the sequence of eight foreign ministers in seven years (Griffiths 2008: 29), in 2009 the newly

appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs Cannon sent the positive message to “re-energize” the Arctic Council (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2009).

The general argument for the benefits of circumpolar cooperation adds up to the specific event of handing the Arctic Council gavel to Canada at the 2013 summit in Kiruna. Unlike the 2011 Nuuk meeting, the admission of new observers to the Arctic Council became a compelling issue at Kiruna and, amidst the increasing media sensationalism over the Arctic, the applications from the East Asian states sparked animated commentaries. At a time when all eyes were on the launch of Canada’s chairmanship of the Council, leaving the decision of the admission of new observers unresolved could have dwarfed the ambitions of the Canadian chairmanship (Pelaudeix 2013).

That said, considering the neoliberal institutionalist concept of “mutual adjustment” (Axelrod & Keohane 1985: 226) as the foundation of international cooperation, one should also ponder the extent to which Canada suffered from peer pressure from the Council member states, particularly the Nordic countries, in the process leading to its decision at Kiruna.

Against this backdrop, Canada’s repeated veto on the EU’s observership application in the Arctic Council constitutes an interesting exception to the predictions of neoliberal institutionalism, and yet another indication of the analytical need to focus on domestic politics in the analysis of a country’s foreign policy. Indeed, domestic politics offers a good deal of explanatory power with Canada’s admission of East Asian observers in the Council, on which, contrary to the Nordic countries and in spite of the clear benefits enucleated by neoliberal institutionalism, Canada has never been vocal.

In this sense, acknowledging that theories such as neoliberal institutionalism assume states as unitary actors, Underdal has written:

“Of course, states are in fact complex actors, and therefore, domestic political processes sometimes produce outcomes that deviate systematically from those that

would be expected to maximize gross national income or some other holistic notion of the national interest” (Underdal 2013: 18).

As for the domestic level, the analysis of international interests, treated in chapter 5, will precede that of international institutions, also placed in chapter 5.

2.5 Institutions at the international level: the observer rules as a means to serve the interests of the Arctic Council

While the establishment of the Arctic Council in 1996 was itself well in line with the logics of neoliberal institutionalism behind the creation of international institutions – states can profit from cooperation with other states and non-state actors to further their own interests and attain mutually beneficial outcomes (Keohane & Martin 1995: 42) – this thesis will only deal with a specific aspect of the institutional evolution of the Council, namely the adoption of rules for the admission and role of observers in the Council. Again, recommending the Arctic Council engagement with non-Arctic others, Griffiths (2008) took a distinct neoliberal institutionalist approach and wrote:

“[The Arctic states] should bring selected non-Arctic states and intergovernmental entities to the table in an arrangement that maintains their power of determination and enhances their sovereignty in conditions of interdependence” (Griffiths 2008: 18).

Milner sees the impact of domestic institutions on foreign policy making to the extent that they let certain domestic interest prevail over others (Milner 1997: 18). By analogy with Milner, I argue that the observer criteria agreed upon at the Nuuk and Kiruna Arctic Council Ministerial meetings facilitates the interests of the Council member states under a neoliberal institutionalist point of view: they keep the leadership of the Council firmly in the hands of the Arctic states, while at the same time making the involvement of new non-Arctic states possible. Notably, the “Kiruna Vision for the Arctic” (2013), adopted in conjunction with, among others, the “Kiruna

Declaration”, stresses that observers must abide by the criteria for observers established by the Arctic Council, clarifying that:

“Membership in the Arctic Council is and will remain for the Arctic States with the active participation and full consultation of the Arctic Indigenous Peoples Organizations. Decisions at all levels in the Arctic Council are the exclusive right and responsibility of the eight signatories to the Ottawa Declaration” (Arctic Council 2013a: 3).

More importantly, the evidence indicates that, throughout the rounds of talks in the Arctic Council, Canada was able to exert a great deal of influence in making sure that the rules on observers, while leading to further clarity and transparency for existing and aspiring observers, that is, recognizing the legitimate interests of non-Arctic states to participating in Arctic politics, would not have Canada compromising on its own definition of Arctic politics.

2.6 Applying the theoretical framework to my case study: a summary

I examine Canada’s foreign policy decision on the East Asian observers following Putnam and Milner, thus combining analyses of domestic politics and international relations. On both levels, I keep the distinction between interests and institutions.

Domestically, as for the interests of national actors, I find a clear example of what Putnam explicitly defines as “politicization of the issue” (Putnam 1988: 455) as a situation happening at level II that may restrict the government’s action at level I. Years of vehement talks on Canada’s North by Harper’s cabinet have pushed the Arctic very high in the public debate and activated groups that, as Putnam puts it, would generally be distant from the matter at stake at the international table of negotiations (Putnam 1988: 445). The vast majority of southern Canada’s electorate, the first source of votes for the government, has never visited the Arctic and is largely uninformed about Arctic politics, and yet has come to see Canada’s sovereignty in the

region almost as an imperative issue. In this, I argue that Harper has resorted to what Putnam labels “transnational issue linkage” (Putnam 1988: 447), as one of the techniques that executives can use at level II to alter the configuration of domestic interests. Namely, Harper has linked the Arctic with external menaces to Canada’s territorial sovereignty.

It results that Canada’s international “negotiating flexibility” (Putnam 1988: 445) is limited. Domestically, where Harper presents the Arctic as an important electoral terrain - in confrontational terms and as the exclusive domain of the Northerners who inhabit it – the more complacent aspects of the “circumpolar story”, including cooperation with Canada’s Arctic neighbours within the Arctic Council and observership to non-Arctic players – are largely ruled out. The effective win-sets at the international level on the admission of observers is thus reduced for the East Asian applications and completely eliminated for the EU’s bid, for which the domestic hype over the seal ban also plays out.

From the side of domestic politics, then, Canada’s decision on the East Asian observers at Kiruna may be explained considering that: Canada’s Arctic indigenous groups were calling for a softening of Harper’s approach on the Arctic, possibly contributing to an enlargement of the international win-sets (this exemplifies the influence that interest groups at level II can have on level I cooperation), and the entry of East Asian observers in the Council is in line with the government’s bigger concerns for Canada’s resource-based economy boost, where East Asian investments are significant. Also, more generally, one should consider the fact that the single East Asian applications did by no means excite the same domestic mobilization as the one from the EU. Instead, the issue was unknown to most, giving Harper essentially free rein at Kiruna, whatever the outcome of the meeting.⁹

Connected to the argument for the East Asian involvement in the participation of Canada’s Northern development is, on the institutional side, the role played by

⁹ This is a state of affairs very similar to what Putnam describes as the “value of secrecy to successful negotiations” (Putnam 1988: 445). On the one side, the discussions at Kiruna were properly secret. On the other side, and more importantly, the Arctic Council is largely ignored in the national political conversation.

devolution. I ask whether devolution can weigh in favour of the interests of Harper's executive for northern development.

The domestic level of the analysis provides a first cut into the rationale behind Canada's positive vote on the East Asian applications at Kiruna. Still, domestic politics is alone not sufficient. Domestic politics helps us understand why Canada was not openly supportive of the East Asian bids, and how those uncertainties were building on domestic electoral reasons, rather than giving an account of why Canada would be favourably disposed to their admission. While domestic politics make a good step in such a direction by pinpointing Canada's domestic economic preferences around the East Asian observership in the Arctic Council, the analysis would still be incomplete without considering the international level.

At the international level of circumpolar relations, where theories of international relations treat states as unitary and rational actors, neoliberal institutionalism proves to provide best support for my research question. Specifically, I find that neoliberal institutionalism has the best take with regards to both interests and institutions.

As for Canada's international interests, neoliberal institutionalism, with its leading assumption that actors come together in common international institutions to "jointly benefits from cooperation" (Keohane & Martin 1995: 42), with a range of absolute gains that encompass defence, economic, and scientific improvements, highlights the benefits to Canada stemming from circumpolar multilateralism. In this vein, the case of Russia's welcoming stand on the Chinese observership bid at Kiruna is instructive for my research. In facilitating a consensus decision on China, Russia was said to be evaluating the economic consequences of such a decision (Røseth 2014: 846; Sergunin 2015, [interview]), significant business deals with China being underway in the Arctic (Bennett 2014; Byers 2013a). Notable is Putin's statement that: "It is well known that, if you stand alone, you cannot survive in the Arctic: it is very important to maintain the Arctic as a region of peace and cooperation" (as quoted in Byers 2013a).

One last point concerning international interests is the "pressure to cooperate" that comes about when a state abides by multilateral agreements, that is, the expectation

that a state will let cooperation flow by a “mutual adjustment” (Axelrod & Keohane 1985: 226) of preferences. Under this perspective, then, Canada would have been “pressured” into favouring the Council’s multilateralism and accepting the East Asian observers.

As for international institutions, of which I only focus on the Arctic Council observer criteria, neoliberal institutionalism offers a basis for understanding the Canadian motivations behind the drafting of the rules. The rules facilitate the participation of observers to the advantage of the Council member states and PPs (“while the primary role of observers is to observe the work of the Arctic Council, observers should continue to make relevant contributions through their engagement in the Arctic Council primarily at the level of Working Groups” (Arctic Council 2013c)), and, specifically for Canada, respond to particular institutional concerns about an “enlarged” Council, such as the preservation of the centrality of the Indigenous participants. Overall, then, Canada (and the Arctic Council) will allow the admission of East Asian observers as long as they perceive a gain.

By summarizing theoretical model and empirical evidences, this section has paved the way for the extensive analysis carried out in the next three chapters that will consider explanatory factors at each of the four levels (domestic interests and institutions, international interests and institutions) singularly.

Chapter 2 outlines the guiding concepts of my theoretical model and indicates the direction of the analysis. The main concept that I communicate is that, in the study of a country’s foreign policy-making, the more attention paid to the link between domestic and international politics, the sounder the analysis.

3 Harper's domestic Arctic agenda

I begin by investigating the extent to which “domestic politics”, as Milner understands them, has affected the Canadian specific outcome of foreign policy at Kiruna, that is, Canada’s decision to admit the East Asian observers. In considering the “structure of domestic preferences” (Milner 1997: 16), I focus on two sets of internal actors: Harper’s executive and one specific interest group, that of Canada’s Northerners, and specifically the Arctic indigenous population. As I have noted in the background section, Canada’s Arctic population is not comprised only by indigenous persons. However, unlike the rest of Canada, indigenous citizens are the majority in the three Arctic territories.

The chapter is structured around the policy preferences of Harper’s cabinet and the main assumption that political actors will make those decisions that maximize their utility function, that is, to retain office (Milner 1997: 33). The preferences of social actors, in this case those of the Arctic indigenous communities, are of relevance as long as they can be said to have acted on the elaboration of the country’s foreign policy (Milner 1997: 60): when an issue of foreign policy affects influential interest groups, executives will modify their stand on foreign policy in order to meet the support of those key interest groups.

In section 3.1, I consider the political strategies on the Arctic that Harper has elaborated in order to gain electoral approval. These include the presentation of an alleged security crisis for the Arctic and strong military tones, under the broader plan for “taking ownership” of the Arctic as a political issue. The result is a domestic political context that is substantially unprepared for sustaining the international development of an East Asian entry in the Arctic Council. As Putnam will phrase it, the spectrum of international win-sets on the specific matter is limited. In section 3.2, I pinpoint how the government’s dominant domestic narrative on the Arctic has changed also as a consequence of the pressure exerted by the northern aboriginals interest group. This results in a potentially bigger range of win-sets at the international level on the issue of the East Asian observers. Section 3.1 and 3.2 confirms that domestic

politics matter in the analysis of Canada's decision at Kiruna: changes in domestic preferences may alter (and augment) the international win-sets. Section 3.3 provides additional evidence to substantiate the claim the Canada's perceived reluctance on "opening-up" the Council may be partially rooted in domestic politics, specifically in Harper's perpetuation of certain political style on the Arctic. Lastly, I summarize the chapter's implications.

3.1 "Use it or lose it"

This section looks at the "politicization" of the Arctic in Canada's domestic politics (Berg 2012: 16). In the first phase of Harper's mandate, the Arctic (and more specifically, in the interpretation adopted by the Conservatives: the Arctic as manifestation of Canada's military sovereignty) was co-opted into the definition of the Tories' political brand. In this sense, the Arctic became one of the Conservatives' favourite platforms to mark the divide between themselves and the Liberals: not only did the Liberals traditionally not pay much attention to the region, but also Canada's North allowed them to appeal to the electorate's traditional fascination with the Arctic.

The implication for my research question is that, in the nationalistic interpretation of Canada's Arctic that resulted – where the Arctic was described mostly in opposition to "others" and under alleged outside security threats – there was scarce room to discuss the issue of "opening up" the Arctic Council, and especially considering that the Conservatives made the protection of Canada's Arctic sovereignty a matter of their electoral accountability.

After its establishment in 2006, the Conservative government worked to foster a political narrative on the Arctic that reasserted the issue of territorial sovereignty in the region as its pillar. With a strong focus on increased military presence, Harper strived to project the image of Canada as an "Arctic superpower" that touched upon the Canadians' attachment to their Arctic. Overall, the impression is that "since December 2005, the government of Canada [...] decided to securitize its political sovereignty, its northern identity, as well as its territorial integrity" (Perrault 2012: 49).

Several commentators (Chase 2014a; Den Tandt 2013b; McParland 2011; Taber 2011; Wells 2013) have pointed to a peculiarity of Canada's political history, namely that the Liberal Party has traditionally "owned the flag" (Chase 2014a). Especially after 1968, the Liberals began to be seen as the guardians of "Canadian values": expressions of Canada's nationhood, most notably the layout of the new Canadian flag, became prerogatives of the Liberals, with the consequence that, the longer they stayed in office, the more a vote against them came to symbolize a vote against Canadian national identity (Coyne 2009). Amidst the oddity of this left-side nationalism, the challenge for Harper as the leader of the Conservative Party running for the premiership was to reinvent Canada's patriotism by reversing four decades of Liberal narrative. In this sense, some spoke of a "Conservative Revolution" (Smith 2012). Harper's turn to the Arctic was thus particularly timely: not only was the Arctic attracting increasing attention internationally, but also the Arctic was one of the few areas "ignored" by the Liberals (Chase 2014a; Chater 2015 [interview]).

In the effort to reframe Canada's national identity, the Conservatives have drawn heavily upon Canada's history (Jeffrey 2015: 342). Interestingly Harper's first address to the Parliament as Prime Minister credited "our head of state, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, whose lifelong dedication to duty and self-sacrifice have been a source of inspiration and encouragement to [...] the people of Canada" (as quoted in Jeffrey 2015: 342). Also, Harper has reintroduced the term "royal" for the armed forces, and, more recently, the 2012 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 was accompanied by great celebrations: the government invested about \$30 million in a campaign to familiarize Canadians with the conflict, and the bicentenary was commemorated by several re-enactments across the country and a series of television ads (Government of Canada 2014a; Jeffrey 2015: 11). While surveys had demonstrated that very few Canadians knew about the War of 1812, the millions of dollars spent for the commemorations showed that Harper saw the war as a founding moment of the national Canadian narrative (Smith 2012: 23).

Increased security in Canada's Arctic was not one of the main themes of the electoral campaign for the 2006 federal elections – after all, the Arctic territories only account

for three federal seats – and, unlike following Throne Speeches, the North was not touched upon during the short Speech from the Throne delivered after the victory of the Conservatives in 2006. Nevertheless, the lines of the Conservatives’ main Arctic strategy until 2010 were delineated already in a 2005 address delivered by Harper, at the time leader of the opposition, in one of the last events before the federal elections.

“A Conservative government will make the military investments needed to secure our borders. You don’t defend national sovereignty with flags, cheap election rhetoric, and advertising campaigns. You need forces on the ground, ships in the sea, and proper surveillance. And that will be the Conservative approach” (Conservative Party of Canada 2005a).

Analogous tones of realpolitik were echoed in the 2007 Throne Speech when Harper, this time serving as Prime Minister, inaugurated the rhetoric of “use or lose it” for the Arctic, critically labelled “a [...] nod to the North enduring symbolic value in Southern Canada” (Abele 2011: 220). “Canada has a choice when it comes to defending our sovereignty over the Arctic. We either *use it or lose it*. And make no mistake, this Government intends to use it” (Privy Council Office, Canada 2007, emphasis added). And once again, while announcing the geo-mapping for the “Northern Energy and Mineral Program” in 2008, Harper stated: “As I have said before, use it or lose it is the first principle of Arctic sovereignty. To develop the North, we must know the North. To protect the North, we must control the North” (Office of the Prime Minister, Canada 2008a).

Until 2008, then, the message of “use it or lose it” was the preferred domestic motto for the Arctic (Wingrove 2013), and “use it or lose it” is commonly taken today to indicate the first, and quite belligerent, period of the Conservatives’ political style around the Arctic (Dodds 2010; Lackenbauer 2009). The expression reduced the politics of the region into the simplistic situation where “either Canada takes action now or it might lose control over its land”, thus conveying a sense of urgency over the defense of Canada’s Arctic borders (Perreault 2011: 52). With this regard, Canadian professor Lackenbauer has spoken of the idea of losing sovereignty “by dereliction”,

that is, by non-occupancy of the territory (Lackenbauer 2009: 9). While the specific wording of “use it or lose it” has since been abandoned, the government preserved the centrality of Arctic sovereignty. For example, the 2010 Speech from the Throne repeated: “Our Government will continue to vigorously defend Canada’s Arctic sovereignty” (Governor General, Canada 2010).

In 2011 Harper’s coalition was finally granted a majority government. One can get a sense of how Harper’s cabinet was being presented to the electorate as a synonym for steady leadership in the Arctic by reading this slogan on the website of one of the Conservative candidates in British Columbia:

“Canadians have a clear choice between Stephen Harper’s low-tax plan for jobs and growth to strengthen Canada’s North and sovereignty, and Michael Ignatieff’s [leader of the Liberal Party] high-tax agenda that will stall our economic recovery, kill jobs, *set back Canada’s North and diminish our sovereignty*” (as quoted in Bennett 2009, emphasis added).

While “Arctic sovereignty” was then made into a buzzword, the purported risk of external menaces to Canada’s authority in the Arctic, and the dynamic of “us Canadian vs. the others” that followed, was another essential component of the Conservatives’ initial public understanding of the Arctic (Chase 2014a; Flanagan 2011: 246). At the end of 2005, in the midst of the federal elections campaign, and just a few days before Harper introduced the “use it or lose it” message for the North, the American submarine “Charlotte” was detected in the Northwest Passage, that is, Canadian Arctic waters, and the episode provoked the vehement reaction of the Conservatives. O’Connor, the Tories’ responsible for issues of national defense, blamed the Liberals for the fact that, under their administration, Canadian waters had been breached multiple times by French, American, and British submarines, and promised that “a Conservative government will make sure that our sovereignty in the North is respected” (as quoted in Canadian Press 2005a).

A pronounced element of anti-Americanism is evident in Harper’s 2005 campaign and, although discarded since then, served to turn “the tables on the Liberals” (Flanagan

2009: 246). Speaking in Winnipeg in December 2005, Harper warned: “There are new and disturbing reports of American nuclear submarines passing through Canadian waters without obtaining permission of, or even notifying, the Canadian government” (as quoted in CTV.ca 2005).

In the same way – a great deal of anti-Russian rhetoric still recurrent in Canada’s political discussions on the Arctic – the Russian flag planting at the North Pole in August 2007 had then-minister of national defense Mackay stigmatizing the incident as the product of a colonialist way of thinking, commenting that states cannot “go around the world and just plant flags and say: “We’re claiming this territory” (as quoted in Parfitt 2007). On that occasion, Harper added that the Russian incident “shows once again that sovereignty over the North and sovereignty in the Arctic is going to be an important issue as we move into the future” (as quoted in Ctv.ca 2007). In 2010, Harper insisted:

“We live in a time of renewed foreign interest in Canada’s Arctic. With foreign aircrafts probing the skies, vessels plying northern waters, and the eyes of the world gazing our way, we must remain vigilant” (as quoted in Akin 2010).

All in all, this kind of rhetoric – militaristic tones and persistent alarmism on Canada’s sovereignty in peril – allowed the government to show off good governance on the Arctic file (that Harper is “doing something”) (Genest & Lasserre 2014: 9) and appeal to the Canadians’ emotional attachment to their Arctic. Commenting on the Russian symbolic initiative on the Arctic seabed, Canadian journalist and expert of Canadian politics Martin wrote:

“Exterior challenges to sovereignty come rarely to our country. When they do, they provide the governing party with an opportunity to gain public favor. Harper happens to be in office when the North finally looms high in the public consciousness, when it has become the new frontier. The North as the new frontier is the issue that can drive the public imagination, raise the patriotic pulse and give the Harper government a shot at a big legacy” (as quoted in Abele 2011: 100).

And the Arctic has indeed long played a great role in the mainstream Canadian culture. Evoked in Canada's national anthem as "The True North Strong and Free," it fosters a "northern mythology whereby Canadians can mark themselves as a tough, vigorous nation" (Zellen 2009: 68).

Canada has traditionally referred to its Northern Aboriginal people in order to assert its sovereignty rights in the region (Grant 2010) and Canadian professor Shadian considered, for example, how over the last decades the Inuit have evolved into a "figure of authority" in Canada's Arctic politics (Shadian 2009: 232). Significantly, an Inukshuk, the Inuit traditional stone landmark, was chosen as the official symbol for the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. The Conservatives, for their part, have regularly presented the Arctic as the foundation of Canada's national identity. Harper used the above-mentioned line from the national anthem on the Arctic as a slogan for his party's website and, for instance, the 2010 "Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy" opens with the assertion that "The Arctic is fundamental to Canada's national identity [and] is embedded in Canada history and culture, and in the Canadian soul" (Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy 2010: 2). Harper has also made the argument for the Canadian Arctic identity part of Canada's diplomatic position on the Arctic. It was a recurrent reference, for example, during the China Arctic Advocacy Speaking Tour organized by the Canadian embassy in China in March 2013 (Genest & Lasserre 2014: 5). The themes of Canada's own "Arcticness" and the safety of the Canadian Arctic borders are well reflected in the bid, passed by the Canadian House of Commons in 2009, to officially add the label "Canadian" to the North West Passage (Pettersen 2009).

Moreover, opinion polls have confirmed that the Canadian electorate is very reactive to the case for Arctic sovereignty.

In March 2007, a survey carried out by "Angus Reid Strategies" (2007) indicated that 52 percent of Canadians believed that Canada should avow its national interests in the Arctic by means of international cooperation, with only 18 percent of the respondent calling for the deployment of more troops (Angus Reid 2007). Two other Angus Reid

Strategies surveys from August 2007 and 2008, that is, in the immediate aftermath of and one year after the Russian power statement in the Arctic, reported that 74 percent of the respondents deemed it necessary for Canada to invest heavily in its Arctic defense, military investments being welcomed also by a fair share of Northerners (Angus Reid 2007, 2008). Similar data were registered in research sponsored by the Gordon Foundation and issued by “Ekos” in 2011 where, among others, more than half of the Canadian sample – between North and South of the country – agreed that the Arctic should be the main pillar of Canada’s foreign policy (Ekos Research Associates 2011:19). In addition, asked about the solution of potential controversies over Arctic boundaries and resources, an average of 42 percent across the country preferred a tough line on Canadian foreign policy in the Arctic, this percentage favoring Canada on top of all other Arctic states (Ekos Research Associates 2011: 42).

At the same time, however, few Southern Canadians have well-rounded knowledge of the Arctic and Arctic politics (and not surprisingly: the largest majority of Canadians live at the border with the US). A recent poll conducted by “Up Here”, a Northern Canadian-based publication, found that a large percentage of Canadians believe that the Arctic is populated by penguins (74 percent) and that Northerners live in igloos (69 percent) (Up Here 2012). Also, according to the most recent survey issued by “Ekos”, the Arctic Council is poorly known in Canada, even among Northern Canadians and in spite of the Canadian Arctic Council chairmanship (only 10 per cent of southerners being aware of the Canadian chairmanship) (Ekos Research Associates 2015). Making politics out of the Arctic becomes easier, then, amidst an electoral fabric that is substantially uninformed about Arctic issues and yet deeply in touch with its Arctic roots (Lackenbauer 2011a: 424).

The evidence presented above has shown that, with Harper’s Conservatives in power, electoral calculations have driven Canada’s domestic politics on the Arctic. In need for validation, Harper has “stepped” into the Arctic with rumbling rhetoric: military proclaims, calls to national unity against alleged outside threats to Canada’s sovereignty in the North, and a general revival of Canada’s Arctic identity- all of this part of the Conservatives’ strategy to further their own political legacy. The Arctic was

then perceived as one of the main issues where the Conservatives could dominate over the Liberals.

The narrative on the Arctic that resulted was a very parochial one, and in this sense the expression “use it or lose it” – the mantra (Dodds 2011: 372) of the Conservatives’ early approach to the Arctic – is emblematic: Canada’s North belongs to Canadians as long as they are prepared to “use it,” that is, as long as they can prove to have the military capability to defend its borders. Therefore, international Arctic politics made it to the Conservatives’ rhetoric only when it could serve their purposes: that Canada is adamant in advocating for the primacy of its national interests and not afraid to let its voice be heard, even when this implies noisy confrontations with Russia and the US over the Arctic.

Having said this, one understands why “East Asia in the Arctic” was not a theme of the Conservatives’ electoral platform, thus considerably reducing the international win-set on this Arctic Council agenda item. On the one side, the international attention for Asia’s polar aspirations was still very limited, and so was the need for Harper to resort to anti-Asian sentiments in the same as he did with the US and Russia. On the other side, and more importantly, given the narrow and simplistic political interpretation of the Arctic that was being promoted at home – according to which the Arctic is first and foremost a matter of Canadian territorial sovereignty – introducing the possibility of cooperation with Asia in the Arctic would be a great political inconsistency and could possibly lead to accusations of hypocrisy and an electoral backlash. As Berg has commented:

“Harper [...] created a climate in which Canadians view their country’s engagement in international cooperation on the Arctic in general, and engagement with non-Arctic states in particular, as concessions undermining Canadian sovereignty (Berg 2012: 17).

Overall, this section has given great support to what Putnam and Milner categorize as office-seeking policies of domestic political actors. These kinds of electoral-driven tactics constitute the most immediate connection between a country’s domestic politics and its foreign policy making. Milner writes that “executives can pick and choose

among policies to best serve their immediate electoral interests” (Milner 1997: 34). This is especially relevant for Canada’s domestic politics on the Arctic.

As discussed above, Harper’s emphasis on Arctic sovereignty is part of the Tories’ effort to reverse a certain trend of the Canadian political tradition, according to which Canada’s patriotism was a cultural prerogative of the Liberals. In this way, the Conservatives can call out the Liberals for not prioritizing military defence in the Arctic, and thus fall short of protecting Canada’s sovereignty at large. As section 3.3 will show, Canada’s integrity in the Arctic is far from being contested, and I argue, borrowing the words from Putnam, that Harper has literally created “a policy option that was previously beyond domestic control” (Putnam 1988: 447), by linking Canada’s North and Canada’s national identity to (alleged) international threats to Canada’s jurisdiction (“transnational” or “synergistic” issue linkage) (Putnam 1988: 447).

3.2 Development enters Harper’s Arctic agenda

As we shall see, I argue that Canada’s welcome to the East Asian observers may accompany a certain toning down and diversification of the Conservatives’ political message on the Arctic in comparison to what I described in the first phase of the Tories’ Arctic rhetoric.

Some commentators (Lackenbauer 2013a; Wingrove 2013) have acknowledged that in the last few years Harper’s government has been less vocal about the military side of Canada’s Arctic: while its traditional tough talk has toned down, greater stress has been laid on the economic potential of the region.

Economic development had always figured among the government’s priorities for the North, and, as early as 2007, Harper made explicit the link between sovereignty and development in the Arctic: “In defending our nation’s sovereignty, nothing is as fundamental as protecting Canada’s territorial integrity; our borders, our airspace and our waters. More and more, as global commerce routes chart a path to Canada’s North

and as the oil, gas and minerals of this frontier become more valuable, northern resource development will grow ever more critical to our country” (Office of the Prime Minister, Canada 2007).

And yet, until lately, development had not been a relevant component of the government’s political campaign on the Arctic. In this sense, the Canadian professor Coates has spoken of Harper’s shift to the idea of “developmental sovereignty” for the North: “trying to incorporate the North into mainstream Canada, [that is,] upgrading infrastructure and encouraging economic development that benefits Northerners” (as quoted in Chase 2014b).

Remarkably, economic development was the leading motif in the remarks delivered by Harper during his Northern summer tours in 2012 and 2013. In 2012, Harper stated: “We are determined through our sustained and unprecedented focus on the North that you shall see unprecedented Northern economic development over the next five years” (Office of the Prime Minister, Canada 2012a). In 2013 he promised: “We are here to talk about [...] development, and specifically, our Government’s plans to ensure that Northerners take full advantage of the new opportunities that responsible resource development will bring. [The North is] a great treasure house” (Office of the Prime Minister, Canada 2013).

The changing pattern in the Conservatives’ rhetoric on the Arctic has also been demonstrated by the study of Genest and Lasserre (2014). They have reviewed seventy-nine speeches on Arctic issues delivered in the period 2006-2010 either by Harper or by the ministers of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Foreign Affairs, and National Defence. Their results indicate an evolution over time (Genest & Lasserre 2014). While in 2006 Canada’s Arctic identity was defined mainly in terms of military defence and territorial sovereignty, since 2009 references to the economic dimension of the Arctic and to circumpolar cooperation have increased (Genest & Lasserre 2014). In the same way, the Canadian professor Nicol looks at how Canadian national media has framed the Arctic since the 1970s, and found that today there

seems to be renewed interest for the issue of natural resources and development in the Arctic (Nicol 2012: 4).

The readjustment of the government's take on the North may be understood as the result of at least two factors acting at the domestic level.

On the one side, there is the growing pressure from the Canadian Northerners. The Canadian professor Poelzer has argued that in the elaboration of Canada's domestic Arctic policy, and uniquely among the Arctic states (Greenland possibly being the only exception), Indigenous people have an influence disproportionally greater than their population size, thanks to their constitutional status and to a genuine realignment between them and the government that is distinctive of Canada's political history, independent from the ruling party (Poelzer (2015 [interview])

However, it is also true that since 2006 Harper's cabinet has come under fire, domestically and internationally, for allegedly failing to act on indigenous issues. In July 2014, an extensive report drafted by the then United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous people Anaya concluded:

“Canada faces a crisis when it comes to the situation of indigenous peoples of the country. Amidst [Canada's] wealth and prosperity, Aboriginal people live in conditions akin to those in countries that rank much lower and in which poverty abounds” (Anaya 2013).¹⁰

And among the aboriginal people of the North, the government's hard-politics language on the Arctic has stirred growing unease (Chase 2014). Ottawa's reiterated concern for military sovereignty in the North is at odds with the Inuit traditional commitment to circumpolar stability and non-militarization of the Arctic, and, more

¹⁰ Canada's Arctic population falls well behind compared to the rest of Canada in terms of infrastructure preparedness, housing facilities, health care etc. (Coates & Poelzer 2014: 29). According to a recent review by the “Community Well Being Index ”(CWB) – a policy initiative sponsored by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to collect indications of the well-being of Arctic First Nations and Inuit communities over time – over the years 1991-2006 those communities have scored around 15 percent lower on average than the rest of the population (O'Sullivan 2011).

generally, clashes with the situation of underdeveloped infrastructures and systemic poverty in the Arctic. As Mary Simon, a prominent Inuit leader, puts it: “Militarization of the Arctic is not in the interests of Inuit who live in Canada, the Soviet Union, Alaska and Greenland. Nor do such military preparations further security or world peace” (as quoted in Zellen 2009: 17)

The Canadian Professor Abele has discussed how, at least until 2011, the emphasis of the speeches from the Throne on securing the national military presence in the Arctic must have sounded displaced to Northerners (Abele 2011: 250). In 2009, a joint statement released by the premiers of the three territories on their shared vision for the future of their lands declared that “maintaining healthy, sustainable communities in partnership with the federal government continues to be a priority for premiers” (Northern Premiers Forum 2009). The already-mentioned 2011 “Ekos” opinion survey showed that, among Arctic inhabitants, “infrastructure to augment individual, economic and environmental capacity” was perceived as an urgent issue (Ekos Research Associates 2011). Accordingly, Arctic indigenous representatives have often been outspoken critics of the government. For example, reacting to Harper’s 2007 “use it or lose it” statement, the mayor of Rankin Inlet, in Nunavut, was quoted saying: “What the hell is he talking about? We have been using [the Arctic] for thousands of years, and we are not going anywhere” (as quoted in Byers 2010: 109). And in a resolute commentary on Nunatsiaq News in 2008, Simon wrote of the government’s “backwards-looking focus” on the Arctic that was detrimental to the interests of the Northerners (Simon 2008).

As a consequence, the government’s bigger talk of development over the last years has been met with rather warm encouragement from Arctic aboriginal leaders. For instance, interviewed in the margins of the 2013 “Council of Federation”, the then-premier of Nunavut Aariak said:

“Lately, we have seen a message shift to issues that have a much bigger impact on the lives of Canadians who live in the Arctic, issues like economic development, housing and the state of our infrastructure” (as quoted in Wingrowe 2013).

On the other side, the Conservatives' acceleration on economic growth for the Arctic territories – that, as the next chapter will discuss diffusely, entails the exploitation of non-renewable resources – is consistent with the government's broader economic strategy for the country, one that gives a central role to the extractive industry. Unlike the Conservatives' early chest thumping on the Arctic, East Asia, in the form of East Asian investments in resource projects, fits well with the stronger domestic prominence of economics in the Arctic (Lackenbauer & Manicom 2013b), and even more given the international rapprochement between Canada and China. In 2012, a study issued by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives concluded optimistically that "Chinese state-owned enterprises are motivated by profit, not national interest" (Canadian Council of Chief Executives 2012).

In the national political conversation of the Conservatives, East Asian countries are never mentioned in relation to the Arctic in spite of their growing involvement; however this should come as no surprise, as surveys (Ekos Research Associates 2011, 2015) show Canadians still perceive China as an un-welcomed partner in the Arctic. Together with Norway, Canadians have the lowest degree of support among Arctic Council states for inclusion of non-Arctic states in Arctic affairs (Ekos Research Associates 2015).¹¹

As a consequence, the government indulges today in a certain militaristic language. Notably, the October 2013 Speech from the Throne dusted off the "Canada First" defence strategy, unveiled in 2008. On the Arctic, the "Canada First" paper states that "as activity in northern lands and waters accelerates, the military will play an increasingly vital role in demonstrating a visible Canadian presence in this potentially resource-rich region" (Canada First Defence Strategy 2008: 8). And the 2013 Speech from the Throne affirmed, among others, that [Canada's military] must have more teeth and less tail" (Parliament of Canada 2012b), disappointing those who had hoped for a new direction of the government's Arctic policy (Murray 2013). Similar criticism

¹¹ However, research sponsored by "The Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada" (2012), despite concluding that Canadians preserve "a lingering hesitation and concern about Asia, particularly China", acknowledges that more than half of the surveyed sampled saw the economic opportunities for Canada of an engagement with China (2012: 14).

followed the much talked-about interview that Harper gave to “The Globe and Mail” in January 2014, where, once again, Harper displayed an alarmist and oversimplified interpretation of Arctic politics.

“There has been a lot of observer countries admitted. Our concern with that, and unfortunately, to be blunt about it, I think frankly this had already gone way too far before we became government. *Literally everybody in the world* wanted to be in the Arctic Council” (as quoted in Chase 2014b, emphasis added).

As the above-section has clarified, in the latest years of the Conservatives’ office the Arctic has entered the national political debated in a more nuanced fashion. On the one side, while electoral tactics persist, the Conservatives have reduced the bellicose language that, at the early stages of their leadership, had essentially portrayed the Arctic as a military outpost. The growing dissatisfaction of Canada’s Northern population for the Conservatives’ “militarization” of the North has called into question Harper’s political accountability and urged him to make Arctic economic development a leading theme of Canada’s politics on the Arctic. On the other side, economic development for the North is in itself coherent with the Conservatives’ neoliberal agenda – that, among others, frames the Arctic as an economic opportunity and encourages resource extraction and foreign investments – and reinvigorated relations with China over the last years.

With regards to the growing impatience among Northerners of the crisis situation in the Arctic presented by the Conservatives, I discuss how Putnam’s and Milner’s arguments on the connection between national interest groups and international cooperation are timely. In this case, the Indigenous Arctic inhabitants, as stakeholders at level II, by rejecting Harper’s alarmism and urging for a more accommodating take on the Arctic, have possibly expanded the win-sets at level I on the issue of East Asian observers in the Arctic Council.

East Asia is still absent from Harper’s public domestic discussions on the Arctic, while, for instance, Russia is being evoked as a dangerous player in the North, and Harper perpetuates seemingly uniformed interpretations of Arctic politics. After all,

the motif of “Canada’s sovereignty in Canada’s Arctic” is resonant amidst the electorate. However, it seems easier now to reconcile the admission of East Asian observers at the Arctic Council with Canada: Harper has largely eschewed his original Arctic militancy, and the emphasis on economic development for the North offers a more welcoming setting for Asian players.

3.3 Harper’s domestic Arctic policy: a reality check

This section will discuss two orders of “reality checks”. In the first part, I will consider the extent to which Harper has followed up on the promises for increased military spending in the Arctic made throughout his mandate. This empirical material will serve to substantiate the argument that, no real sovereignty threat endangering Canada’s Arctic, the Conservatives have exaggerated the case for improved defence in the North aiming for electoral consensus. And, in the second part, this is confirmed by extracts from secret governmental documents that leaked over the past few years.

Since first campaigning for the premiership, Harper has promised more efficient measures to protect Canada’s sovereignty in the Arctic with rather bold expressions, such as “the single most important duty of the federal government is to protect and defend our national sovereignty” (as quoted in Flanagan 2009: 62). Like Martin, and others before him, Harper dedicated his first official trip in 2006 to the North (Abele 2011: 220), and since his first mandate, trips to Arctic (at least once a year) have become something of a highly publicized routine, as well as an occasion for the government to showcase its strategy for the North.

In the run for the 2006 general elections, Harper introduced the plans of the Conservative government for bringing control over the territory of Canada’s Arctic back among the national priorities. The \$5.3-billion strategy over five years included, for the North, the construction of three heavy naval icebreakers that could transport troops, the refurbishment of the Canadian Rangers, a section of the Canadian Forces specifically allocated for the security of the North, and the building of a new dock in the region of Iqaluit (Conservative Party of Canada 2005b). Harper coupled these

commitments with criticism for the “phony promises” of the Liberals and their failure to protect Canada’s sovereignty in the Arctic (Conservative Party of Canada 2005b). In 2007, the heavy icebreakers presented during the 2006 electoral campaign were dismissed in favour of eight smaller Arctic/Offshore Patrol Ships (Office of the Prime Minister 2007) (a decision that spurred criticism, as the Patrol Ships cannot break the ice and go considerably slower, and were mocked as “slush- breakers” (Byers 2014)), and in 2008, amidst great patriotism, Harper disclosed plans for the new Coast Guard heavy icebreaker CCGS Diefenbaker, “a major Arctic sovereignty project [and] the largest, most powerful icebreaker Canada will ever have owned” (Office of the Prime Minister 2008).

To date, however, the implementation of these commitments for increased defence in Canada’s Arctic has lagged behind (Byers 2013b; Jarratt 2014).

The construction of the Patrol Ships has encountered multiple delays. In October 2014, the Officer for the Parliamentary Budget Officer published the report “Budget Analysis for the Acquisition of a Class of Arctic/Offshore Patrol Ships” (Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer 2014). The report concludes that the project of the government to build eight Patrol Ships needs to be scaled back to four Patrol Ships because of inadequate budget, and warns that, should more postponements occur, inflation would make the funds sufficient only for three Patrol Ships (Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer 2014: 2).

The planning of the Arctic port, another flagship of Harper’s plans for the Arctic and whose location has been moved in the meantime from Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, to the very small town of Nanisivik, has also had a bumpy ride. The construction works, set for 2010, have not started yet, and since then the costs have more than doubled. In the same way, the date for the delivery of the ship Diefenbaker is still uncertain (CBC News 2013).

All in all, it seems that Harper’s travels to the North, though meant to display Canada’s firm presence of the Arctic territory, have instead become the occasion to concentrate on the fallacies of Harper’s domestic strategy for the region. For instance,

Harper is often photographed together with the Canadian Rangers while participating in expeditions in the territory and firing rifles, and he has stated: “it was an honor to patrol with the Rangers as they work to defend our territory from potential threats, and emergencies and keep our North strong, secure and free” (as quoted in Chase 2014). And yet, while the composition of the Canadian Rangers has been augmented by almost 1000 volunteers in order to balance the larger population of the North, their equipment remains surprisingly out-dated. Plans to substitute their 65-year-old rifles are being postponed, and the Rangers often have to supply their own snowmobiles, the government having put on hold the purchase of new machines until 2021 (Byers 2013b). According to the Canadian legal scholar Byers¹²: “The prime minister using a [Lee Enfield .303 rifle] is an interesting reflection of how the government has failed in terms of its Arctic policy” (Byers 2013b).

Moreover, in spite of enthusiastic announcements, Canada seems to fall behind in terms of structural preparedness in the Arctic. In 2013, a report on Federal Search and Rescue compiled by the Canadian Auditor General’s Office highlighted significant deficiencies in the search and rescue system in Canada and called into question Canada’s ability to respond to emergency situations in the Arctic (Auditor General of Canada 2013), after that, in 2011, the Canadian Senate had spoken of “discouraging and potentially dangerous” shortcomings (Senate of Canada 2011: 40).

Commenting on the big picture, Byers puts it quite bluntly: “It is striking how [plans] have been scaled back over the course of the last seven years. [This indicates that] the Arctic is not an actual priority for the Harper’s government” (as quoted in Jarratt 2014). And others (Coates et al. 2010) have admonished the government to redirect its Arctic strategy, for it currently builds upon a distortion of the state of affairs in the North. They write:

“An Arctic strategy based on current headlines will not work. The Far North is not going anywhere, the Russians are not coming, and the real threats to Canadian

¹² The reader should note here that Byers has also been involved in Canadian politics in opposition to the Conservatives. In 2008 Byers ran for the Canadian left wing party New Democratic Party in the federal riding of Vancouver Centre.

sovereignty are much less dramatic than the current rhetoric would have the country believe” (Coates et al. 2010: 54)

In this vein, Byers has gone a long way in recounting what I may summarize as the gap between “rhetoric and reality in Canada’s North.” Byers’ main point is that the Conservatives’ domestic approach to the Arctic will be displaced as long as it will be anticipating military threats posed by other states in the North. The reality is that Canada’s current security challenges in the Arctic come from non-state actors (Byers 2015a). Firstly, there are risks of environmental damages, most notably those related to oil spills (Byers 2015a). The largest incident of this kind to date has been that of the “Exxon Valdez” in southern Alaska. Byers notes that, while those waters are ice free and comparatively warm, should such an event occur in Canada’s Arctic waters the consequences will be catastrophic and the operations arduous, primarily given the region’s difficult accessibility (Byers 2010: 14). Another threat to Canada’s Arctic environment may concern illegal dumping in the Canadian Ocean (Byers 2015a). Secondly, non-state threats have the form of criminal activities. Byers refers to the apprehensions voiced by former US ambassador Celucci that the Northwest Passage might become a new trafficking route for weapons of mass destruction, and adds that ice-free waters in the region could facilitate the smuggling of weapons and drugs, as well as access of illegal immigrants (Byers 2010: 80). Byers discusses how the number of episodes of illegal immigration in Canada’s Arctic is abundant – among others, in 2007 five Norwegians attempted to traverse Canada’s Northwest Passage and sailed through more than half of it before being arrested – and questions the implications of this phenomenon. For instance, illegal shipping could involve terroristic activities (Byers 2015a). Byers emphasizes that these are urgent issues for Canada – as the country with the world’s longest coastline – and thus for North America is general (Byers 2015a).

That said, Byers blames Harpers’ cabinet for essentially putting forward, or at least promising, military solutions for potentially critical situations that are not military problems (Byers 2010:18). In this, he critically looks at the government’s already mentioned decisions of building light patrol ships instead of replacing the Coast Guard

ice breakers at the end of their working life (Byers 2010:18). Byers also notes that multiple delays for the “Diefenbaker” project will have consequences in such that when the icebreaker will be ready, the conditions of the Passage will resemble those of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, longer south in the country, and the deployment of the “Diefenbaker” will be an exaggeration (Byers 2010:18). Byers is clear: “Canada [is] AWOL in the North,” that is, it is structurally unequipped to respond to the kinds of threats, from illegal immigration to drug smuggling, that endanger its North (Byers 2010: 18). He concludes by saying that “what the Conservatives do” compared to “what the Conservatives say” on the Arctic draws a pattern of governmental actions confirming they do not see any international military threat in the Arctic. Harper’s domestic emphasis on the confrontational side of Arctic relations is thus simply intended for political electoral hands (Byers 2015a).

I argue, then, that two factors manifest this process even more. On the one side, only minor disputes challenge Canada’s Arctic sovereignty, these rather being “a fight between lawyers”, to the extent that as early as 2004, even before all the hype on Canada’s Arctic came about, Griffiths spoke of the “pathetic fallacy that Canada’s Arctic sovereignty is on this ice” (Griffiths 2004). On the other side, WikiLeaks cables from U.S. diplomatic documents dating from 2009 and 2010 largely reported by Canadian media, reveal that, contrary to bold political statements, the Conservatives’ more private conversations did not foresee any real threat to Canada’s sovereignty in the Arctic, and that Canada’s Arctic partners did not take Harper’s alarmism seriously. The leaked cables speak of Harper’s promises for defense policy in the Arctic as “driven by political rather than military imperatives” (WikiLeaks 2009a) and highlight Harper’s “frosty rhetoric” on the North (Wikileaks 2010a,b).

Two WikiLeaks cables from 2010 read:

“That [Harper’s] public stance on the Arctic may not reflect his private, perhaps more pragmatic, priorities was evident in the fact that during several hours together with [U.S Ambassador to Canada] Jacobson on January 7 and 8 [2009] which featured long

and wide-ranging conversations, [Harper] did not once mention the Arctic” (Wikileaks 2010a).

“PM Harper contended that [the Arctic] should not be a centre for future conflict. He commented that there is no likelihood of Arctic states going to war” (Wikileaks 2010b).

In November 2012 CBC News wrote of a confidential document drafted in September 2012, supposedly an outline of the new “Canadian foreign policy plan,” obtained from the Canadian Foreign Affairs (CBC News 2012a). The CBC piece reproduces only some extracts of the plan, but is clear that the emphasis is primarily on Canada’s international economic relations. On a general note it is stated that: “We need to be frank with ourselves: our influence and credibility with some of these new and emerging powers is not as strong as it needs to be and could be. Canada’s trade and investment relations with new economies, leading with Asia, must deepen” (CBC News 2012a).

More specifically, according to CBC, the document also spells out the economic potential of the Arctic and the Chinese interests. As the news clipping puts it:

“The Arctic is becoming another tool of economic diplomacy. The new foreign policy states: “Canada’s international agenda will increasingly be shaped by [...] the interest non- Arctic nations, including China, are showing” in northern resource development” (CBC News 2012a).

The two “reality-checks” examined above pose a significant implication for my research question, that, from the side of Canada’s domestic politics on the Arctic, Canada’s welcoming of the East Asian observership applications becomes less of an unanticipated move as soon as one is able to scrape off the Conservatives’ tough talk on the North. From the one side, Arctic affairs seem not to be a top priority of Harper’s personal agenda, and one does not understand, then, why keeping Asia out of the Arctic should be a programmatic point of the government’s plans for the Arctic.

From the other side, when the Arctic is discussed in private, it occurs in different terms than the belligerent tones that make headlines.

It is evident, then, how under the Conservatives the Arctic has been traditionally intended as an electoral weapon. Significantly, in spite of years of fervent advocacy for “use it or lose” militaristic policies in the Arctic, many promises are left unmet, and Harper’s private discussions show no sign of alarmism on the Arctic, even during the years when the nationalistic rhetoric on the North was at its peak.

This section has collected further evidence for the leading argument in Putnam and Milner, in that a variety of elements acting at the domestic level influences the possibilities for international cooperation in such a way that international cooperative endeavours are “a continuation of domestic political struggles by other means” (Milner 1997: 10). In particular, this section has shown how, for the sake of electoral validation, Harper has been able to protract a political situation at home whereby the multilateral aspects of Arctic politics were forcedly left out, that is presenting at home severely limited options of international win-sets on East Asia and the AC. “Forcedly” because the two “reality checks” reveal that Harper himself was aware that there were no reasons, other than electoral considerations, to do so.

3.4 Summary and implications

This chapter has discussed Canada’s positive stand on the East Asian observers at Kiruna by looking at the influence of domestic politics. In light of Putnam’s and Milner’s models on the role that electoral calculations of the executive power can have in affecting a country’s foreign policy. I have considered how the preferences of political (Harper’s executive) and societal (Canada’s Northerners) actors are associated with Canada’s position of foreign policy at Kiruna.

This chapter has played a part in answering my research question by showing that Harper’s electoral considerations over time may explain Canada’s decision.

Firstly, I found that Harper has worked to build his political legacy by employing, among others, a very narrow understanding of the Arctic. The Arctic under the Conservatives becomes primarily a matter of domestic politics: characterized in military terms, tied to Canadians' national identity, and defined in opposition to "others". In a situation whereby making jabs at the U.S. and Russia over the purported violation of Canada's Arctic borders is common in Harper's rhetoric, the international spectrum of win-sets on the admission of East Asian observers in the Arctic Council is greatly reduced.

Secondly, I found that, starting from 2010, the pressure of Canada's Northerners, by insisting on a more cooperative message from the government, may have expanded Canada's options of win-sets at the international level.

Lastly, I have hinted at the fact that the government's specific economic interests towards natural resource growth in the North may explain the Canadian engagement with East Asia in the Arctic Council. This will be treated extensively in the next chapter.

4 Harper's vision for economic development in the North and devolution

Chapter 3 introduced the subject of economic development for the North in the analysis of Canada's domestic politics, and Northern economic growth will be the core theme for this chapter. Chapter 4 will continue the discussion on the preferences of domestic actors and will extensively investigate the link between domestic institutions – namely the institutional process of devolution in Canada's Arctic – and international Arctic cooperation in the specific example of Canada's consent to the admission of the East Asian applicants as observers in the Arctic Council.

I will make use of two of Milner's concepts, namely interests of domestic actors and domestic institutions.

Firstly, with regards to the preferences of domestic actors, I will look at those of the executive (Harper's cabinet) and those of Canada's Northerners. Milner observes that when electoral deadlines are not approaching and thus there is no pressing concern on the ruling coalition for short-sighted electoral promises, economic policies may enter the government's agenda (Milner 1997: 43). Section 4.1 will present Harper's general economic plan for the country, and will show how it has evolved in a way that makes resource-based development in the North a significant component and one that may well fit with East Asian investments (as indicated in section 4.2). As for the interests of Canada's Northern citizens, chapter 3 has also argued that the government's "shift to development" for the North (Wingrove 2013) may be related to more specific electoral circumstances. On the one side, the large security commitments for the North lose electoral appeal as they suffer from multiple delays; on the other side, the voices of discontent from Northerners and their calls to the government for acting on the North-South gap have grown louder. Section 4.4 will describe the Northerners' general attitude towards economic development in their land.

Secondly, I will elaborate on Milner's intuition that a country's political institution may influence a certain direction of foreign policy (Milner 1997: 127). In particular Milner discusses that particular institutional structures can let one or more domestic voices emerge over others, with consequences for the country's diplomacy. I will relax Milner's argument – for she only looks at power-sharing between the executive and the legislature (Milner 1997: 127) – and question, in section 4.4, whether devolution and Aboriginal self-government can help the Conservatives put forward in the North their economic plan based on the exploitation of natural resources, with investments from East Asian being a part of it.

Section 4.5 will open the way for chapter 5 by framing the analysis of chapter 4 within the context of the Arctic Council.

4.1 Harper's economic strategy for the North

As the following section will discuss, the East Asian participation in the economic development of Canada's North may just be the natural continuation of the Conservatives' economic plans for Canada's Arctic. Harper's government has put remarkable emphasis on Canada's energy potential and has implemented a variety of initiatives to facilitate the resource-based economic growth of the North. As chapter 3 and 5, this chapter will begin by examining Harper's distinctiveness, this time in the field of economic policies. I will build my argument by first looking at the Conservatives' general economic plan, and then examining how this applies to Canada's North.

Speaking in Whitehorse, the capital of Yukon, during his 2012 annual summer tour, Harper promised:

“[The] great national dream — the development of northern resources — no longer sleeps. It is not down the road, it is happening now. The North's time has come, my friends, and you have seen nothing yet” (as quoted in Campion-Smith 2012).

Harper's statement is well-founded, considering the oft-quoted evaluation released in 2008 by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) which estimates that the Arctic could contain about 13 per cent of the world's untapped reserves and 30 per cent of the world's undiscovered natural gas reserves (Brid et al. 2008). As for Canada, according to evaluations, "approximately 35 percent of Canada's remaining marketable resources of natural gas and 37 per cent of remaining recoverable crude oil is in Northern Canada" (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 2012). Canada is also one of the world's largest mining countries: in 2012 mineral exports generated over \$ 90 billion, that is, 20,3 percent of the country's total export share (Natural Resources Canada 2013). About half of this production comes from northern mines (Bone 2012: 143). After the collapse in commodity prices following the 2009 economic crisis, the activity in the North is expected to rise once again (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 2014), nearly doubling its values before 2020 (The Conference Board of Canada 2013).

Canada's Arctic territories rich mineral resources include gold and coal in Yukon, iron ore and zinc in Nunavut, and gold and diamonds in the Northwest Territories (Goldstein 2014: 562).

Over the last decade, the growing interest of energy companies for Canada's North has attracted high public attention, with Simon, former president of the "Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami" speaking of "unprecedented resource development opportunities" (as quoted in Saunders 2014). And yet, Canada's Northern economy is no stranger to mining and petroleum exploration: resource development in the North started as early as the Klondie Gold rush in Yukon in the 1890s and the discovery of the first oil field in the Mackenzie River Valley in 1920 (Nuttall 2009: 73).

As for access to Arctic oil, the two most promising reserves – the Mackenzie Delta and the Beaufort sea – are still far from exploitation (Bone 2012: 154). In its last 2011 review, Canada's "National Energy Board" reported that there is no current offshore drilling activity in Canada's Arctic, and that the Office has not received applications yet, although they "expect to see such applications in the future" (National Energy

Board 2011). In the Subarctic region, oil and gas production is mostly concentrated in Alberta and northern British Columbia, with reserves located also in Yukon and the Northwest Territories (Bone 2012: 155). Northern Québec is said to hold great energy potential, too (Plan Nord Québec).¹³ As for mining, the government is currently assessing 31 mining projects in the North, with the production set to start before 2020. It is estimated that the operation will trigger some \$ 24 billion in capital investment and account for more than 10 000 operating jobs in the region (Parliament of Canada 2012a).

Shortly after becoming Prime Minister, Harper stated that Canada was “an emerging energy superpower” (Government of Canada 2006), signalling that the Conservatives’ economic strategy for the country would be the promotion of development and growth through the extensive extraction of natural resources.

The Canadian researcher Healy has noted that Harper’s neoliberal plans for Canada followed the “already extremely laissez-faire” approach of the previous Liberal administration under Martin (Healy 2008: 9), so that, as Canadian professor Abele has pointed out, Harper’s interest for the Northern energy potential is essentially nothing new under the sun (Abele 2011: 224). However, while former executives “envisioned progress in the North as a matter of social and political as well as economic development” (Abele 2011: 224), in the case of Harper’s cabinet it seems that “a very narrow definition of national interests (focused on defence and non-renewable resource development) has emerged” (Abele 201: 225).

The clear preference for a model of development based on non-renewable natural resources and the scarce consideration for scientific expertise on climate change warrants the label “the most pro-resource extraction government in Canadian history” (Greaves 2013: 61) and constitutes one of the most controversial chapters of the Conservatives’ administration. In 2011, backed by the parliamentary majority granted at the federal elections, the Tories passed the omnibus Bill C-38 that contains very significant changes to legislation, mostly notably concerning the environment, inciting

¹³ See appendix 2: Map of Canada.

protests from the aboriginal movement “Idle no more”. Moreover, Harper’s 2006 commitments to implement directives for limiting carbon emissions have not been kept (they will be in a “couple of years” (as quoted in Leslie 2014)), with Canada instead becoming the first signatory to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol in 2011.

The “New York Times” (2014) reports that between 2008 and 2012 the total communications between government officials and representatives of the oil industry were as high as 2 733, largely above every other industrial sector (Leslie 2014)¹⁴. And, interestingly, on the occasion of the 2011 victory of Harper’s coalition, the international news service “The Barents Observer” summarized the electoral outcome as “a boost for Arctic sovereignty and offshore oil” (Pedersen 2011). The Canadian researcher Greaves has commented that, all in all, Harper’s approach to the economic development of Canada’s North seems to be not different from his government’s economic strategy for the whole country, that is, Canada as a natural-resource exporter (Greaves 2015 [interview]). Writing on Canada’s Arctic, Lackenbauer has summarized the issue as follows: “Harper’s government obviously embraces a development model rooted in the idea that improved social indicators will follow economic development, particularly in sectors such as oil, gas and mining” (Lackenbauer 2013a).

Data show how profound Canada’s economic turn from the manufacturing sector to non-renewable natural resources development was over the last decade (Campbell 2013; Stanford 2008: 84). In 2011 the value of oil and gas exports was almost twice the level in 2001, while mining exports have increased more than 270 per cent (Campbell 2013).

Against this backdrop relations with China become essential. China is Canada’s second largest trading partner (Lansford 2014: 238): Chinese investments in Canada have more than doubled between 2008-2011, accounting for more than \$ 14 billion (Parliament of Canada 2014), and Canadian investments in China have increased by

¹⁴ Fjellevang has examined the Canadian lobbyist registry and has found that the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) has outnumbered any other lobby groups in the period 2008-2012 in terms of number of communications with public officials (Fjellevang 2014: 62).

nearly 40 percent since 2009 (CBC News 2010), with Harper speaking of building a “strategic partnership with China” (as quoted in CBC News 2010). The number of high-level visits between the two countries has increased significantly since 2009, leading, among others, to a \$ 2.5 billion commercial deal with China and the establishment of Canada-China Natural Resource Fund (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2014).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the theme of Canada’s Arctic economic development has been recurrent in Harper’s political platform, even though, in the first half of his mandate, the main item featured a blaring rhetoric on military sovereignty in Canada’s North.

As early as 2007, announcing the construction of the deep-water port in the Arctic, Harper stated: “More and more, as global commerce routes chart a path to Canada’s North and as the oil, gas and minerals of this frontier become more valuable, northern resource development will grow ever more critical to our country” (Office of the Prime Minister Canada 2007). The “Northern Strategy” follows suit and reads: “Mining activities and major projects [...] are the cornerstone of sustained economic activity in the North and the key to building prosperous Aboriginal and Northern communities” (Canada’s Northern Strategy 2009: 15).

Accordingly, over the years the Conservatives have implemented several measures to assist resource development in the region. In 2008, the government announced the investment of \$ 100 million for the modernization of the Geo-mapping for Energy and Minerals (GEM) program in the Arctic to provide better expertise for private investors in the region (Office of the Prime Minister, Canada 2008). In 2009 Canada’s Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor) set to stimulate business development in the North by focusing on mining, tourism, fisheries, and cultural industries (Achievements Under Canada’s Northern Strategy 2011 3-4), in addition to the Northern Projects Management Office (NPMO) (CanNor 2015). In 2010, the government started the review of the Northern Gateway Project, a 1,170 km long

pipeline for the transportation of crude oil cutting through the North (Government of Canada 2014b).

In late 2012, writing from the pages of “Northern Public Affairs,” Aglukkaq, recently appointed Canada’s Arctic Council chair, introduced her vision for the development of the North (Northern Public Affairs 2012). The emphasis on the North’s resource possibilities and foreign investments was evident: “We are at a point where Canada’s North has the potential to become an engine for economic growth for the entire country and a world-class destination for the resource development sector” (Northern Public Affairs 2012: 31). In her speech at the “Arctic Frontiers Conference” in January 2013, Aglukkaq discussed business and development in the Arctic and did not mention climate change at all (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2013a). Interviewed only a couple days before the start of the Canadian Arctic Council chairmanship, Aglukkaq promised that scientific research would not stop under the new round of chairmanship, but also added emphatically:

“For 16 years, the Arctic Council has been very focused on research – science research. You know, we talk about this as an area that is developing – Canada’s North is developing, the Arctic region of every country’s developing. *But it’s the private sector that’s actually going to develop those regions — not scientists*” (as quoted in Boswell 2013, emphasis added).

Finally, and in line with Canada’s domestic initiatives to bolster Arctic economic development, Aglukkaq announced at the Arctic Council meeting in Kiruna the creation of a “circumpolar business forum”, today renamed “Arctic Economic Council” (AEC), possibly the flagship of the Canadian Arctic Council chairmanship (Exner-Pirot 2014b).

By articulating the main features of Harper’s economic policy for Canada’s North, this section has introduced a possible explanation – that will be strengthened throughout the chapter – for Canada’s acceptance of the East Asian applications under domestic economic interest. I argue that Canada’s positive stand on East Asia in the Council

may reflect Canada's domestic plans of increased economic partnerships with East Asia.

With specific attention to the development of natural resources, this section has laid the basis for the discussions of the next two sections, that is, the present status of the East Asian involvement in the development of Canada's Arctic and the institutional phenomenon of devolution.

4.2 The East Asian economic engagement with Canada's North

This section will delineate the current East Asian economic activities in Canada's North, thus paving the way for the argument, developed in section 4.5, on the role of Arctic Council as catalyst for the Canada-East Asia economic engagement. This section thus helps answer my research question in the sense that, given the growing value of East Asian investments in Canada's Arctic, it becomes profitable for Canada to strengthen diplomatic ties with these countries by granting their admission as observers in the Arctic Council.

The present dimensions of the East Asian economic interests in Canada's North should not be exaggerated, as they build for the most part on long-term developments of the Canadian Arctic (Holyroyd 2012: 2). For the East Asian states, the commercial opportunities of the region revolve around Arctic navigation and Arctic energy and minerals (Holyroyd 2012: 2; Huebert 2012;; Humpert 2013: 7).

As for Arctic navigation, it is calculated that the Northwest Passage that cuts through the Arctic Ocean would drastically abbreviate the route between Japanese and Germany ports by saving more than 4000 nautical miles in comparison with the Panama Canal, that is, substantially reducing the expenses of moving large cargos of at least 20 percent (Holyroyd 2012: 3). However, while the Northeast Passage above Russia is already accessible for a few months every year, the Northwest Passage will not be ice-free at least before 2040 (Chen 2012) and, in general, navigation plans in

Arctic waters are complicated by polar darkness, major insurance costs, and underdeveloped search-and-rescue apparatuses (Lasserre 2010: 7). Accordingly, Chinese representatives from the shipping industry do not consider Arctic navigation to be a viable possibility for at least the next ten or twenty years (Holyroyd 2012: 3).

As for Arctic oil and gas, the potential for an East Asian engagement in future projects in the North is good, even though only few details from the government describe ongoing projects (Lackenbauer & Manicom 2013b: 13; Nicol 2015 [interview]).

In January 2011 Korea Gas Corp (KOGAS) struck a \$ 30 million deal to purchase a 20 percent stake of the Canadian MGM Energy gas reserve in the Mackenzie Valley Delta (MGM Energy Corp 2011: 5). The agreement marked the first resource development in the North Pole by a South Korean firm, which, as a statement from Korea's Ministry of Knowledge Economy read, "will establish a bridge headed to enter the promising frontier" (as quoted in Bennett 2011). Interviewed on the deal, the mayor of one of towns in the area said that Koreans are "good people" (as quoted in Vanderklippe 2011). In July 2011, Canadian media reported of the partnership between the Calgary-based company Northern Cross and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) for the exploration of Eagle Plain's natural gas basin in the northern Yukon (which might contain nearly six trillion cubic feet of natural gas) in provision of future tapping of oil and gas (Yukon News 2012). In welcoming the agreement, Northern Cross president Wyman commented:

"[The Chinese] have a longer-term vision, and in northern Canada you need a longer view. North America doesn't have much of an appetite of growing energy demand, whereas Asia does" (as quoted in Yukon News 2012).

China is also said to be the main driver of the above-mentioned project for the Northern Gateway (Moore 2012). Indeed, in March 2012, the Chinese oil company PetroChina voiced the proposal to contribute \$ 5 billion to the infrastructure (Cattaneo 2012). In response to the devaluation of the US currency, in the last decade Asian oil companies have been directing billion dollars of investments (Lackenbauer &

Manicom 2013b: 13) into the subarctic site of Alberta oil sands (Bone 2012: 171), one of the world's largest oil reserves.

The list of the Asian activities is long (Bone 2012: 171). For example:

- In August 2006 Korea National Oil Corporation (KNOC) acquired the BlackGold bitumen deposit, aiming for a production of an average of 10 000 barrels per day.
- In March 2011, China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) replaced the Canadian Opti Canada with a \$ 2.1 billion purchase of a share in the Long Lake project.
- In October 2011, the Chinese oil giant Sinopec gained access to 174 million barrels of oil with the acquisition of the Calgary based Daylight Energy Ltd.

As for mining, the opportunities for an East Asian participation are even larger, considering that, for instance, China is the largest consumer of mineral zinc (Lackenbauer & Manicom 2013b: 14). China has become a recurring mention in the Nunavut Mining Symposium that takes place every year in Iqaluit, Nunavut. In 2011, analysts spoke of a “tsunami” of investments from China into mining companies in Nunavut (as quoted in George 2011), while the overall message from the 2014 conference was that “the future of mining in Nunavut is all about China” (as quoted in Bell 2014).

The higher mineral prices revitalized proposals for mining projects in Canada's North that long sat stagnant because of the major costs of operating in the Arctic, and that may now progress also thanks to the involvement of East Asian stakeholders. Mary River and Izok Lake are among the most relevant developments.

The Mary River Project is located on northern Baffin Island, in the Nunavut territory and, with an ore grade of nearly 67 percent, is regarded as one of the world's most promising mining initiatives (Baffinland 2013). The Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) issued the authorization for the construction of the mine in December 2012, and, although the investments have been considerably scaled back – from \$ 4 billion to

\$ 740 million – the site has moved into production and still constitutes a major hope for the industry of Nunavut in 2015, expected to provide more than four million tons of iron ore (Baffinland 2013).

The Izok Lake project was presented to the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) in late 2012, and it is currently being reviewed by the Federal Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (MMG 2013). The mining activity of the site is estimated to earn over \$ 390 million, that is, approximately 20 per cent of Nunavut's total production in 2013 (MMG 2013). The case of the Izok Lake may be indicative of the future trend of Chinese involvement in the development of the area (Lajeunesse & Lackenbauer 2013). The project is owned by the Australian company MMG, whose major shareholder is China Minmetals Corporation (CMC) (MMG 2013). MMG is a global leader in the production of zinc and has so far been operating mainly in Australia (MMG 2013).

While speculative commentaries have been written about hundreds of Chinese workers landing in Greenland (Lanteigne 2014: 26), Canada has the human capital to sustain such projects (Lajeunesse & Lackenbauer 2013), and MMG has openly stated that it plans to employ and engage local labours and practices of Nunavut and to distribute shared benefits (MMG 2013). Given the meaningful role that the Arctic plays in Canada's politics, it should also be kept in mind that no government "would care to suffer the political backlash of employing Chinese workers when there are unemployed Canadians" (Lajeunesse & Lackenbauer 2013). MMG has also been active in the evaluation of the costs for remediating the mining site after the project completion (MMG 2013). At the last Nunavut Mining Symposium in April 2015, Japanese representatives reportedly put on the table projects for copper exploration in the western Nunavut community of Kugluktuk (George 2015). "We think we have a great start at building something terrific," said the Canadian interested partner (as quoted in George 2015). The Japanese also proposed economic contributions to the Izok Lake project (George 2015).

At the 2014 Arctic Circle Assembly, Québec Premier Couillard and the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources responsible for the Plan Nord, Pierre Arcand, showcased “Plan Nord”, a massive economic development strategy launched in 2011 worth more than \$ 80 billion (Plan Nord Québec). Although East Asian investors were never mentioned, Premier Couillard declared that “Québec welcomes partners also around the world that want to engage” (Government of Québec 2014). And East Asia was certainly in his mind: he recently visited China looking for investors and said: “China is on its way to becoming the world’s number one economic power, if it is not already. For us, it represents an important market and source of investment ” (as quoted in Vendeville 2014). Finally, Canadian Professor and Arctic expert Lanteigne has pointed out that the Chinese interest for investments in the North is now evident also from the large delegations China is sending to Arctic conferences (Lanteigne 2015 [interview]). Lanteigne made the example of the last “Arctic Frontiers Conference” in Tromsø in January 2015, where the message imparted by the big Chinese delegation was: “We are looking for partners” (Lanteigne 2015 [interview]).

Section 4.2 has given account of the current proportions of the East Asian economic engagement in Canada’s North, showing that there is actual substance for the government to move forward with its economic strategy, and that East Asian potentially is a key partner. The next section will investigate which role devolution can play in this.

4.3 Devolution

The following section will bring out the institutional leg of the domestic analysis. Specifically, I will investigate whether the institutional process of devolution in Canada’s North, which has progressed significantly since Harper’s Conservatives took power, can be put in relation to Harper’s strategies for resource development in the North and, consequently, with the Asian economic involvement in the region and Canada’s decision at Kiruna on the East Asian observers. My proposition resounds Milner and her argument on domestic institutional circumstances that, by giving more domestic leverage to domestic actors rather than others, can facilitate the emergence of

their preferences on the international level and thus influence outcomes of foreign policy (Milner 1997: 99). I ask whether, given Harper's government clear inclination towards exploiting Canada's energy potential – that may in itself account for Canada's welcome to the East Asian observers, as East Asian countries constitute a major market for the Canadian natural resources – devolution can even further enhance the government's strategy, and thus (indirectly) relate to Canada's stand at Kiruna. My starting point is the argument that the institutional setting in Canada's Arctic – as it has recently evolved with devolution – may create more favourable conditions for East Asian investments in the region.

Bone has broken the history of resource development in the Canadian North down into two phases. In the first stage, until the late twentieth century, Ottawa put forward a markedly *laissez-faire* agenda for the North (Bone 2012: 136). Amidst the rise in number of “megaprojects” - fuelled by capital from large outsider firms in the South and whose revenues were primarily directed at the provinces, the federal government, and international companies – the interests of the indigenous communities of the region were often neglected (Bone 2012: 136). For instance, in the early 1950s the construction works for the first US “megaproject” – a colossal infrastructure for the mining and transportation of iron in the area of Northern Quebec and Labrador – were completed with no consideration for the population and the ecosystem of the region. Bone writes: “At that time, few rules and regulations were in place because Canadian society and its government saw megaprojects as an effective way of opening the North” (Bone 2012: 136).

In the second stage, concerns for the Aboriginal groups entered Ottawa's economic policies for the North (Bone 2012: 136). This resulted in stricter directives for investments in the region and a general modification of the *laissez faire* plans of the government towards a more progressive approach to development. Two factors triggered this turning point.

From the one side, non-governmental organizations started powerful campaigns exposing the risks of unregulated development for the Arctic, and, following the

“Berger Inquiry”(1977) in the 1970s, the environmental issues of the North gained broader coverage in the national media. Berger, chair of the Royal Commission of Inquiry in charge of assessing the impacts of the construction of a gas pipeline along the Mackenzie Valley, had conducted some 300 formal hearings with representatives from Aboriginal communities and scientists. The 1977 final report “National Frontier, Northern Homeland” (1977) highlighted environmental dangers as well as social costs of the project with severe gaps in the consultation process with locals. The Inquiry was fundamental in that it altered the perceptions Canadians held of northern development (Bone 2012: 95; Nuttal 2009: 74).

From the other side, and more importantly, rulings from the Supreme Court paved the way for land claim agreements between Arctic indigenous people and the central government. In this sense, the 1973 ruling in the “Calder” case gave legal recognition to the Aboriginal title of lands of the Crown – in other words, Indigenous inhabitants must be given a say in the management of the lands they live on in terms of consultation and environmental assessments (Bone 2012: 93). With “Calder”, the Court left to further negotiations the actual definition of the title in case no previous treaty between the parties existed. This so-called procedure of “land claim agreements” was then started by the decision of the Court in the 1997 “Delgamuukw” case (Bone 2012: 94), recently improved by the articulation of the so-called “duty to consult and accommodate”¹⁵ (Coates & Poelzer 2014: 23; Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 2011). Today, over 40 percent of Canada’s landmass is regulated by “land claim and self-government agreements” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 2015). As Bone puts it, “this system has enabled Aboriginal peoples to gain control of a portion of their traditional land base and to

¹⁵ Settling the Haida and Taku River cases in 2004, the Supreme Court of Canada formally established the so-called “duty to consult and accommodate”. Elaborating on the regime of land claims agreements, the Court ruled that the government has a duty to consult, and possibly accommodate, when considering initiatives (such as the construction of pipelines or docking facilities) that might negatively impact Aboriginal or Treaty rights (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 2011). “The duty stems from the Honour of the Crown and the Crown’s unique relationship with Aboriginal people” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 2011).

share in the decision-making concerning the approval rejection of industrial proposals in their territory” (Bone 2012: 136).

The institutional process of devolution, the main focus of this section, builds on and runs parallel to the one of land claim and self-government agreements (Coates & Poelzer 2014: 2). Devolution indicates “the transfer of government power, authority, and resources from the national government to sub-national governments” (Coates & Poelzer 2014: 2) - that is, from Canada’s federal government to the three northern Territories – that has been ongoing in Canada’s North since the 1970s.

While devolved powers have long concerned only regional competences such as healthcare and education, with land management being retained by Ottawa, the 2003 devolution agreement between Yukon and the federal government transferred to the territory control over land and resource management (Government of Canada 2013). Devolution has advanced significantly under the Conservative government: in 2008 Canada and Nunavut agreed on a protocol for further negotiations on devolution, and in May 2013, the “Northwest Territories Land and Resource Devolution Agreement” came into effect (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 2013). While to date Nunavut is the only territory without a devolution agreement, in February 2015 the premier of Nunavut expressed his commitment to achieve such a result for Nunavut as well (Rennie 2015).

The innovations in the governance of Canada’s North over the past four decades have been greeted with enthusiasm, despite going largely unnoticed in the mainstream coverage of national media (Exner-Pirot 2013). Coates and Poelzer speak of a “devolution revolution” (Coates & Poelzer 2014) and emphasize how the process has happened smoothly and relatively successfully, considering the number of structural challenges that affect the region (Coates & Poelzer 2014: 5).

Harper’s Conservatives first announced plans to move forward with devolution in 2009, when “The Northern Strategy” was unveiled. The “Strategy” states that the government will support Northerners’ quest for increased control over “their economic and political destinies” by favoring the transfer of powers over the natural resources of

their territories (Canada's Northern Strategy 2009: 1). Interestingly, "The Northern Strategy" introduces another focus area for the North, namely the "promotion of social and economic development":

"From the development of world-class diamond mines and massive oil and gas reserves, to a thriving tourism industry that attracts visitors from around the globe, the enormous economic potential of the North is on the cusp of being unlocked" (Canada's Northern Strategy 2009: 4).

The "Strategy" then goes on with the Conservatives' policies for supporting the development of Northern natural resources, mentioning "regulatory systems" and investments as "critical infrastructure to attract investors" (Canada's Northern Strategy 2009: 5). While the prioritization of non-renewable resource-based growth for the North under Harper has been dealt with in section 4.1, as well as the establishment of resource development initiatives like CanNor, I will now look at the relation between such a model of development and the institutional innovation of devolution.

In this vein, Medalye and Foster have stressed that "The Northern Strategy" (2009) "emerges at the [...] intersection of the [...] opening of the potential for resource extraction in the North [...] and the emergence of the Canadian neoliberal state and its relation to Northern development" (Medalye & Foster 2012: 96). Consequently, they maintain that, by improving devolution agreements – that, to a large extent, resolve the ambiguity about the stakeholders in North by crystallizing ownership and control of natural resources – the Conservatives prove their commitment to institutional measures supporting the expansion of capital in the North (Medalye & Foster 2012: 98). In this, Harper aims at creating a "stable platform for multinational resource extraction" (Medalye & Foster 2012: 94) and removing institutional ambiguities that deter investments (Medalye & Foster 2012: 94).

Similarly, Everett and Nicol placed the acceleration on devolution in the context of the Conservatives' political agenda for economic development in the North, which they see as informed, even more clearly since 2010, by a pronounced emphasis on neoliberalism and the extraction of natural resources (Everett & Nicol 2014: 12).

Accordingly, they argue that devolution increases the possibilities for extensive regional ventures in Canada's North by creating a more conducive climate for resource industries (Everett & Nicol 2014: 13). They write: "The devolution of powers of control over natural resources creates considerable opportunity for territorial governments to generate income through larger shares of resource bonanzas" (Everett & Nicol 2012: 12).

These considerations may well fall within the broader argument developed by Cameron in the analysis of the formation of the Quebec nation during the first year of Harper's mandate in 2006. On that occasion, Harper submitted the Québécois nation motion to the House of Commons in a supportive move to the Québécois nationalism that was "surprising", in the words of Cameron (2008: 419), given that in 1997 Harper blamed the tendency for an "appeasement of ethnic nationalism" he had believed to stem from Canada's political tradition (as quoted in Canadian Press 2005b). Cameron questions Harper's view of federalism and concludes that, notwithstanding the particular electoral considerations of the case, Harper's political move follows what she defines as "hard neoliberal approach to Canadian federalism" (Cameron 2008: 420). This approach, according to Cameron, has great confidence in private markets and thus prescribes a very limited role for the federal state and a well-marked constitutional division of powers (Cameron 2008: 420).

"The Harper's approach [to federalism] involves identifying the "core" responsibilities of the federal government and leaving as much else to the provinces (and through them to the *market*) as they can politically get away with" (Cameron 2008: 427, emphasis added).

In this, as Cameron goes, Harper's Conservatives prove to adhere to a very literal interpretation of the constitutional text, possibly a "return to a clear delineation of the responsibilities of each level of government" (Cameron 2008: 427). And in 2008 Cannon, at the time the Transport Minister for the Conservatives, expressed this clearly by stating that "our autonomy position as a political party is to respect the Constitution as it was written" (as quoted in Leblanc 2008).

While Cameron focuses on Canadian federalism in general, the Canadian scholar MacDonald has possibly come even closer to my analysis by evaluating the emerging phenomenon of “neoliberal aboriginal governance” in Canada (Macdonald 2011). MacDonald looks at devolution as a component of the government’s neoliberal agenda, and argues: “this strategy is not simply about meeting the demands of Indigenous people but also about meeting the requirements of the contemporary governmental shift towards “privatization” within liberal democratic states” (MacDonald 2011: 256).

MacDonald starts off from the “common belief” that neoliberalism and Indigenous self-governance are by nature movements pointing in opposite directions. She formulates Indigenous self-determination as an expression of those multicultural policies that the neoliberal culture, centred on the “politics of privatization” would discard (MacDonald 2011: 260). She considers, for instance, the contested dismissal of the “Kelowna Accord”, one of Harper government’s first actions towards Canada’s indigenous population¹⁶. The Canadian professor Slowey (2008) had condemned the “neoliberal globalization” for being a “destructive force”, for it undermines the welfare-state foundations upon which Aboriginal communities heavily rely (Slowey 2008: xiv)

That said, MacDonald finds instead that neoliberalism and Indigenous self-governance may substantially overlap, a significant point in common being the premium that they place on the autonomy of the market, which for Canada’s North resource-rich territories and Canadian Northerners entails control over their natural supplies (MacDonald 2011: 263). She thus concludes: “Since neoliberalism favours a system of policies and processes designed to assist the marketplace, First Nations self-determination becomes more attractive than First Nations dependence on the state” (MacDonald 2011: 264).

¹⁶ In November 2005 in Kelowna, British Columbia, Aboriginal leaders and representative from the federal government headed by then-Prime Minister Paul Martin from the Liberal Party signed the agreement, “First Ministers and National Aboriginal Leaders: Strengthening Relationships and Closing the Gap” (also known as “Kelowna Accord”) (Patterson 2006). The overarching ambition of the agreement was to help close the poverty gap between Native and non-Native Canadians. The new Conservative Indian Affairs minister Prentice allegedly rejected the Kelowna Agreement as a mere “one-page press release” (CBC News 2006).

The positive relation between devolution and increased Indigenous self-governance through land claims agreements from the one side, and resource-based economic development for the North on the other side should be the main take-home message from this section so far. Indeed, Coates and Poelzer, explicitly number “the national desire to unlock more of the resource potential of the Far North” (Coates & Poelzer 2014: 11) among the main drivers of devolution in Canada’s Arctic. The Canadian researcher Greaves has articulated on the matter, and reasoned that devolution may help the federal administration advocate for resource development, for it creates a “proxy government” with a pro-development agenda in the form of the territorial level of government (Greaves 2015 [interview]). In other words, devolution can release the “pressure” from the federal government as it introduces other actors – the northern Territories – pushing in the same direction of resource development (Greaves 2015 [interview]).

Devolution and East Asian investments in Canada’s North

In what follows, I try to bring my analysis a step further and I search whether devolution and the growing Aboriginal degree of self-determination can relate to East Asia, specifically to the possibilities for East Asian investments in the region.

To a certain extent, this is made explicit by “Cassels Brock & Blackwell” that, as one of the largest Canadian law firms, represented the federal government in the negotiations on devolution in the Northwest Territories. In a report published on their website, they discuss the changing institutional panorama in the North and, mentioning “opportunities for Chinese investors” (Cassels Brock & Blackwell 2014), explain:

“Increased autonomy in Canada’s north will reduce the amount of regulatory oversight on mining projects and shorten the period required to complete the permitting process. [Therefore] devolution [...] is a tremendous step forward because [...] up to now *the lack of clarity regarding the various administrative and regulatory regimes in the North has presented a major obstacle to exploration and resource development in one*

of Canada's most mineral prolific regions" (Cassels Brock & Blackwell 2014, emphasis added).

In the same way, Steinberg et al. have characterized the territorial governments as "gatekeepers" that, by virtue of devolution and the increased control over natural resources that follows, can profit from external investments in the region (Steinberg et al. 2015: 101). They argue that this may even happen for Nunavut, where, as said, devolution is still to be achieved (Steinberg et al. 2015: 101). In this, they report the opinion of a Canadian elected official stating: "The Government of Nunavut is probably the most motivated and is well placed at the moment to gain benefits from resource development, because all the good lands have been selected by the Inuit" (Steinberg et al. 2015: 101).

Moreover, in 2011 China, following the steps of Japan and South Korea, signed an exclusive import deal with Canadian Inuit communities for seal meat, skins and oil (Steinberg et al. 2015: 101). This clearly indicates that the indigenous people's increased relative autonomy in the management of the natural capital of their lands can make room for external actors' appetite for natural resources. Steinberg et al. quote an US state-department official commenting that non-Arctic states, by directly engaging with key non-state Arctic actors such as Aboriginal groups, are "skipping the middle man" in the Arctic (as quoted in Steinberg et al. 2015: 102). In the words of the official:

"They are having trade negotiations between the Inuit and the Chinese directly, not with the Canadian government, because the Inuit have mineral rights over some of their lands, so they are bypassing the Canadian government and going directly to indigenous folks, who are putting on their website, "We are open for business"" (as quoted in Steinberg et al. 2015: 102).

The situation described above, whereby the augmented level of control that devolution gives to Northerners over their natural resources may open the door to Asian investments, is well summarized by the occurrence of the premier of the Northwest Territories McLeod speaking at the Canada-China Business Council in September

2012. On the occasion McLeod advertised the business opportunities of Chinese investors, stating:

“Today our mineral resources are still our biggest asset and represent the best investment opportunity for China. More oil and clean natural gas deposits are being found every year. And the Mackenzie River has some of the best undeveloped hydroelectric resources in North America” (Northwest Territories Canada 2012).

Contrasting views on devolution and economic development in Canada’s North

With all I have said above, I will reveal that during my research I have found that devolution – as a complex phenomenon that, in the case of Canada, is still relatively recent – seems to generate uncertainty, especially when put, as I try to do, in relation with the “business side” of Canada’s North, Harper’s neoliberal economic strategy, and the Asian economic involvement. I also suspect that this is a “political” theme, that is, one whose interpretation may change depending on where on a liberal to conservative political spectrum one decides to look at it from.

All in all, this encourages a further problematization of the issue around what I break down as two main points.

Firstly, the positive relation between devolution and easier institutional conditions for resource development is disputed.

Greaves has discussed the empowerment of the local level of government, through the simultaneous processes of devolution and land claim agreements may in fact complicate, instead of clarify, the institutional setting of Canada’s North by creating additional institutional players (Greaves 2015 [interview]). Greaves explains that Canada’s North is experiencing two institutional phenomena: on the one side, devolution of federal powers to territories through negotiated agreements with the federal government; on the other side, the growing body of precedent by the Supreme Court acknowledging Aboriginal title and greater Aboriginal control over resource

development in their traditional territories (Greaves 2015 [interview]). On the latter point, Greaves mentions the 2014 “Tsilhqot'in” decision of the Supreme Court (Supreme Court of Canada 2014: SCC 44), which was greeted by the British Columbia First Nations as a “game changer” (as quoted in MacCharles 2014). The “Tsilhqot'in” ruling is indeed an unprecedented step forward for Canada’s Natives because the Court, starting from the claim of the Tsilhqot'in tribe, which numbers just 3000 people, adopted an expansive interpretation of the Aboriginal title (MacCharles 2014). The Court stated that the Aboriginal title may not be “site specific” (Supreme Court of Canada 2014: SCC 44), that is, limited to a specific village, and granted to the Tsilhqot'in tribe “right to use and control the land and to reap the benefits flowing from it” over an extremely vast surface of some 1,750-square-km. According to Greaves, then, it is now more likely that as Aboriginal rights increase – “de facto” a veto power on the use of their lands – controversies over resource projects will end up in courts, substantially delaying resource development (and East Asian investments) (Greaves 2015 [interview]). In this respect, Greaves concludes that the Peel watershed case in Yukon is instructive. Development in the Peel River watershed region is today the bone of contention between the territorial government, who after the devolution agreement stepped in with a markedly pro-development approach, and the aboriginal community of First Nations and environmentalist groups (Greaves 2015 [interview]).

Moreover, according to Canada’s professor and executive chair of the “International Centre for Northern Governance and Development” Poelzer, devolution does not necessarily mean more or less development in Canada’s Arctic, for development becomes a choice of the residents (Poelzer 2015 [interview]). Also, Poelzer maintains that it is improper to see devolution as a specific item of Harper’s Conservatives’ agenda: devolution, as he puts it, is not a right or left initiative, but rather a matter of democracy, that is, empowering the local communities on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity (Poelzer 2015 [interview]). And Canadian professor Nicol contends that CanNor’s commitment to make communities “shovel ready” through supporting job training and infrastructure opportunities is of even greater

significance than devolution in terms of “opening up” Canada’s North to development (Nicol 2015 [interview]).

As for the second point, Canada’s northern resources risk being caught up in the tension between “prosperity and exploitation” (Saunders 2014). This “side of the story” is particularly controversial and it is a thorny issue among Northerners. “The North’s resource boom: Is it prosperity or exploitation?” was the name of a conversation among experts started by “The Globe and Mail” in 2014 (Saunders 2014), and in June 2012 CBC Radio broadcasted a conference from the Nunavut town of Iqaluit titled “Is Canada making the right moves in developing the north? (CBC Radio 2013).

Given that is almost uncontested that Canada’s North needs development (Huebert as quoted in Saunders 2012), the issue ultimately boils down to a matter of sustainability. The Canadian historian Grant has spoken of an “excitement” for the economic promises of the North, similar to the time of the Yukon Gold Rush at the end of the 1890s (as quoted in Saunders 2012), but she has warned that, as for the present, economic growth in the Canadian Arctic is built on non-renewable resources and powered by foreign capital – from both the South of the country and international investors (as quoted in Saunders 2012). In either case the prospects for Northerners are not promising. Grant explains, “If these new industries are Canadian-owned, the major benefits will go to the southern-based corporations. If foreign-owned, the profits will go elsewhere with the federal government benefiting from taxes and royalties” (as quoted in Saunders 2012). In the same way, professor Nicol notes that Canada’s North is a vulnerable economic environment, still based on the success of projects where most of the investment is not domestic but centred on U.S., European and East Asian capital (Nicol 2015 [interview]). Indeed, to date the possibilities for Aboriginal-controlled development corporations in the North are still underappreciated (Coates & Poelzer 2014: 27).

Nicol points to the reality of “megaprojects” as the current defining feature of Northern development (Nicol 2015 [interview]). The state of “megaprojects” in

Canada's North is something that Bone has treated extensively. Bone describes "megaprojects" as "huge industrial undertakings that transform small areas of the Northern hinterland into industrial nodes with the sole purpose of exporting a commodity to other parts of the world" (Bone 2012: 76), with recurring characteristics such as building expenses higher than \$ 1 billion and the dominant role played by outside investors (Bone 2012: 82). The dilemma, according to Bone is that, while for the time being "megaprojects" represent the most certain path to Northern growth, their success is based on non-renewable resources that put the sustainability of the development at stake (Bone 2012: 82).

On this, Poelzer (2015) has suggested that skilling up Northerners through CanNor is in itself an example of sustainability (Poelzer 2015 [interview]), while Flanagan, former campaign manager for the Conservatives, has taken a very pragmatic stand, discussing that, just like in Alberta, where the oil sector is the first private employer for the locals, so too can the North enjoy resource extraction benefits because, at the end of the day "the best social program is a good job" (Flanagan 2013).

In this section I have developed my hypothesis on how the domestic institutional development of devolution plays out with regards to international cooperation, that is, how devolution relates to East Asian investments and possibly to Canada's inclination in having East Asian observers at the Arctic Council table. In this, I have based my argument on Milner's model that domestic institutions can determine whose interests will prevail at the domestic level, conditioning the outcomes of foreign policy. I was specifically interested in investigating the extent to which devolution, and the higher degree of clarity of stakeholders in the North (considering also that devolution builds on the contemporary process of Aboriginal self-governance) could help Harper further his business agenda in the North.

Overall, I found that devolution as the domestic institutional leg of explanation is not as critical as I had initially suspected, and, while I have provided considerable evidence for concluding that devolution could actually help resource-based development in the North, it seems too early to make a step further by drawing a

significant connection between devolution, the East Asian economic involvement and the East Asian successful applications at Kiruna. In fact, a number of legal challenges need to be clarified first domestically, particularly in light of the (at times) competitive processes of devolution and Aboriginal self-governance. The next two sections constitute a bridge with chapter 3 and chapter 4, respectively. Section 4.4 goes back to the interests of Canada's domestic societal groups with regards to economic development in the North, questioning Harper's room for manoeuvre on the issue. Section 4.5 opens up the analysis to the international level by framing Canada's prospects for Arctic economic growth within the Arctic Council and the observership status of the East Asian countries.

4.4 Clarifying the positions of the Indigenous population

This section will discuss the positions of Indigenous people on both economic development in the North and the admissions of East Asian observers into the Council. This section will show that Northern Aboriginal communities are generally in favour of sustainable resource development. As for the admission of East Asian observers, this section demonstrates that, where serious opposition to applications for observership arose among Indigenous organisations, this was only the case for the EU application. As far as the East Asian states were concerned, Indigenous groups were either openly supportive or merely cautious. The implication this poses for my research question is that, concerning the East Asian observership applications, consequences of electoral accountability for Harper's government would not have been as serious as for the EU application.

Writing on the Northerners' perception of economic development for their homeland, the Canadian historian Grant has urged to dispel the "Arctic Wilderness Myths" (Grant 1998), that is, a vision for the Arctic as a vast unspoiled region that must be protected from commercial activities. This is an idealism that largely does not resonate with the Aboriginal communities of the North: in fact, sustainable commercial growth is essential to their survival. According to Grant (as quoted in Zellen 2009: 37), the

“Inuit Circumpolar Council Principles” are inspired by a “holistic approach” to the Arctic: the Inuit population is committed to safeguarding the specificity of their territories, while at the same time finding new economic opportunities in their land. Indeed, in the “Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Resource Development Principles” it is stated “Inuit welcome the opportunity to work in full partnership with resource developers, governments and local communities in the sustainable development of resources” (ICC 2011). As Cournoyea, former premier of the Northwest Territories and member of the Aboriginal Pipeline Working Group quite candidly put it, “Let’s face it: there is going to be development” (as quoted in CBC Radio 2013). Also, in the already mentioned report on the living conditions of Canada’s Indigenous communities, Anaya recounts to have found general support for development across the indigenous population (Anaya 2013).

After all, oil has been an important component of the life of the Canadian Arctic indigenous for centuries, long before contacts with Southerners began. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Dene aboriginal tribes guided geologists come to explore the region across the territories to the “Legohili”, that is, “the place where to find oil” in the Dene language, and oil was traded among indigenous communities and used, for example, as construction sealant (Nuttall 2009: 73). Shadian has retraced the history of the circumpolar Inuit politics and observed that oil played an important role in the establishment of the ICC in 1977, to the extent that “in many ways, [it] was born from this “politics of oil”” amidst a common effort from the Aboriginal people to make a stand for their participation in the economic development of their regions (Shadian 2014: 90). In the words of Zebedee Nungak, a representative for The Northern Quebec Inuit Association, created in 1972 to bring the interests of the Inuit of Quebec in the negotiations with the federal government:

“We the Inuit are experiencing a time in which our land is being exploited and explored by various mining, oil, and “progress” development companies. We are aware that development of various kinds is inevitable in our land at some time or other. *We want to make it clear that we are not against any and all development.* But

this is our land and we will not be bypassed in planning, participation, and benefit of such development activities” (as quoted in Shadian 2014: 91, emphasis added).

Other than for resource development, at this point a clarification is also needed about the positions that Canada’s Indigenous communities have on the admission of observers in the Arctic Council, and especially with regards to the much discussed applications from China and the EU. After that the outcome of the Kiruna talks had been made clear and the Chinese admission as observer finalized, a good deal of scepticism came from Penikett, former premier of Yukon. Writing on the Canadian publication “Northern Public Affairs”, Penikett rebuked Canada’s decision to endorse the Chinese application, reasoning that it contradicted the results of an opinion poll conducted in the North (the Ekos 2011 survey mentioned in chapter 3) – showing that Northerners saw China as the least appealing partner in the region – and that it contravened the Council formal criteria for admission of observers (Penikett 2013: 77). Specifically, he argued that, while pledges to respect the interests of the Arctic Indigenous inhabitants had come from the EU, China had not taken a clear position on the issue, and thus could not formally meet the standards for observership, also given its controversial history with respecting to minority rights (Penikett 2013: 78). All in all, as Penikett concluded, the Canadian move of foreign policy was “curious”, and should call into question the government’s accountability (Penikett 2013: 78).

However, the situation I have been confronted with is more complex than the one described by Penikett. First of all, as Canadian professor Lasserre has pointed out, while native organisations are indeed strong actors in shaping Canada’s Arctic policy – this being exemplified most clearly by Canada’s rejection of the EU application to the Arctic Council under pressures from Canada’s aboriginal groups – one does not see why some organisations afraid of China should ultimately prevent Canada from accepting China (Lasserre 2015 [interview]). Lasserre has added that:

“[In the case of the] EU, the seal ban was a direct hit at the very economy of many Inuit communities. As for China, we are talking about some organizations fearing their influence could be diluted: fears are not damage. Penikett might be disappointed but

native organizations are not the only ones to shape Canada's foreign policy, and since China had accepted the principles of the Nuuk criteria, there was little ground to rebuff it" (Lasserre 2015 [interview]).

The point being, as the long time Arctic Council negotiator Fenge has remarked, the stand of Canada's Indigenous people on the question of observers is far from monolithic (Fenge 2015 [interview]). A variation of opinions on the issue is, indeed, what I have found. As the next chapter will discuss more extensively, the EU seal ban has had Canadian Inuit leaders most vehemently contesting the European application, with Canada's government, in the person of the Inuk Aglukkaq, bringing those concerns to the discussions at the Council – a sign of the genuine alignment between Ottawa and the Inuit (Enxer-Pirot 2013). Still, on the EU bid, the view from the Arctic Athabaskan Council (that, as the Inuit Circumpolar Council, represents Canadian Arctic indigenous groups in the Arctic Council) was very different. In a communication forwarded in June 2013 to Prime Minister Harper, the AAC invoked the principle of the Ottawa Declaration that establishes for the PPs "active participation and full consultation with the Arctic Indigenous representatives within the Arctic Council" and pressed the government to give account for the postponement of the EU application after the Kiruna meeting (AAC 2013). The AAC contended that, since having "consistently supported" the admission of the EU as observer, requested to be "informed about the on-going debate concerning the role and place of the European Union in the Arctic" (AAC 2013).¹⁷

Additionally, it emerges from the correspondence made available on the AAC website that the AAC's support has been consistent throughout the years not only for the EU, but also for other applicants, among which, and more interestingly for my argument, the East Asian observers. For example, as early as 2009, the AAC expressly took position in favour of the East Asian observership in the Arctic Council, as this would represent a means to "educate" (AAC 2009) Asian states on Arctic issues, especially

¹⁷ Chater reminds, however, that the seal ban does not affect the traditional way of life of the Athabaskan communities (Chater 2015 [interview]). Yet, in solidarity with the Inuit population, in 2013 the AAC submitted a petition against the EU seal ban.

concerning the environment (AAC 2009). “We believe that Canada should use the Arctic Council [...] to engage and persuade non-Arctic states to address Arctic concerns in international negotiations” (AAC 2009).

The Inuit have often been more reluctant to welcome Chinese stakeholders to the Arctic Council. In February 2013, asked about the possibility of a Chinese and European permanent seat at the Arctic Council, Audla, president of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, voiced the risk for Permanent Participants of having their voices in the Council diluted and said: “Permanent observer status in the Arctic Council is crucial, but we think with China and the EU, we need to look at them closely” (as quoted in Gregoire 2013).

But the Inuit front itself was not as solid as one may think, considering that in an editorial published just a few days before the Council meeting in Kiruna, the Canadian newspaper “Nunatsiaq News”, with possibly the largest circulation in Nunavut (Nunatsiaq News), titled: “Most Arctic Council applicants pose little risk” (Nunatsiaq News 2013). The article reasoned that “on the observer applications from China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and India, there appears to be no valid reason for the Arctic Council to keep them out” (Nunatsiaq News 2013).

Milner has discussed that key interest groups at the level of domestic politics, by supporting or opposing the government’s conduct on issue areas of foreign policy, can ultimately exert influence on a country’s international diplomacy (Milner 1997: 35). This section has looked at the preferences of Canada’s Northerners, the social group I believe holds greatest leverage on the areas I address in my paper. I have found that Harper enjoys a good amount of political leeway with regards to both economic development in the North and the admission of observers to the Council. This speaks to my research question to the extent that, under the perspective of economic development for the North, on the admission of East Asian observers (framed here mostly as business opportunities for the North), Harper enjoys a good deal of political flexibility and that, referring back to Putnam, internationally the spectrum of win-sets for Canada is rather elastic. Where Canada’s international room for manoeuvre is

limited is, as this section has just introduced and chapter 5 will treat extensively, the issue of the European observership application.

4.5 Economic development, East Asia and the Arctic Council

This section builds on the economic argument for the Canadian-East Asian cooperation in Canada's North presented in the sections above and, paving the way for the analysis in chapter 5, deals with the properly neoliberal institutionalist question of why Canada would prefer cooperation with East Asian states within the Arctic Council over single bilateral relations. While the starting point of this section is, as for the whole chapter, Canada's interest for the East Asian economic involvement in the North, at the end of the section I will expand my focus and look into scientific cooperation in the Arctic.

Speaking of the Canadian Arctic economic engagement with East Asian investors, Canadian professor Poelzer has debated that he does not see the East Asian participation to the work of the Arctic Council as necessarily related to an increased flow of investments in Canada's North (Poelzer 2015 [interview]). In other words, he excludes that there is any significant correlation between Canada's positive vote on the East Asian applications at Kiruna and Canada's prospects of improved economic cooperation with East Asian players in the Arctic. As Poelzer puts it, Canada has traditionally proved to be more keen on the bilateral side of Arctic politics, and also East Asian states were engaged in the Arctic well before all the ado about "China in the Arctic" came about (Poelzer 2015 [interview]).

Poelzer has thus raised an interesting point, which one could extend to other areas like scientific research in the Arctic: why would Canada need East Asia in the Council when collaboration with states such as China and South Korea could be pursued instead in other, bilateral, venues?

A first argument that may answer this question has been formulated concerning Canada-European Union relations in the Arctic (Nunatsiaq News 2013). In this sense,

analysing the troubled case of the European seal ban, it has been stressed that, in spite of seal hunting being of real and symbolic importance for the Inuit population of the Arctic, “Canada has far more to lose if the EU were to retaliate following a denial of its EU observer application. That could jeopardize economic renewal in regions like southern Ontario, where more than 200,000 manufacturing workers have been displaced over the past decade” (Nunatsiaq News 2013).

And this may well apply to the East Asian states. Accordingly, commenting on the challenges for the Canadian Council chairmanship, Huebert wrote that, in case of a new deferral for the Chinese application, “China could view such a postponement as a slight, which could in turn affect other aspects of the relationship” (Huebert 2012). This is especially significant considering Harper’s recent efforts to recast in a positive light foreign policy relations with China. This is a point that Røseth has raised about Russia and its acceptance of the Chinese applications – in that it had become politically risky for Moscow to reject the Chinese bid given the considerable size of oil agreements on the table with China (Røseth 2014: 846) – and this seems particularly timely also for Canada.

It follows, then, that by engaging East Asian states in the Arctic Council as observers, Canada may have also aimed at enhanced bilateral relations on Arctic issues. Greaves believes that the Canadian support for the East Asian applications at Kiruna came as a means for Canada to win some good will from China – especially in light of Canada’s reestablishment of Chinese diplomatic ties – and the other major superpowers (Greaves 2015 [interview]). Greaves also explicitly links the admission of the East Asian states with Canadian domestic considerations of economic gains, arguing that, in light of the huge capital that East Asian states could bring into the development of Canada’s North, the prospect of facilitating these investments flows must have accounted, at least partially, for Canada’s decision (Greaves 2015 [interview]). In a similar way, commenting on the outcome at Kiruna and Canada’s Arctic policies, Byers has emphasized Canada’s reinvigorated relations with China (Byers 2015b [interview]).

This is confirmed by discussions with Canadian officials – that Canada welcomes the deepening of bilateral ties with China (Canadian officials 2015 [interview]), and is reflected in a statement by the Canadian Ambassador to China Saint-Jacques released in the aftermath of Kiruna.

“While the Arctic Council remains the leading body for international cooperation in the Arctic region, we hope that China’s admittance to the Arctic Council as an observer will result in enhanced opportunities for *bilateral engagement between Canada and China on Arctic issues*” (Government of Canada 2013a, emphasis added).

Also, the summary compiled by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013) after a bilateral summit in June 2013 between the Canadian and Japanese Prime Minister stated that both parties hoped to strengthen bilateral discussions on the Arctic under the Canadian chairmanship (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan 2013).

Secondly, the Council may offer a good opportunity for Canada to educate East Asian states about Indigenous issues in the Arctic. This type of argument has been advanced not only by experts (Holyroyd 2012: 6; Lackenbauer & Manicom 2013a:) but also, as seen above, by the Athabaskans (AAC 2009). In the words of the Canadian professors Lackenbauer and Manicom (2013a):

“[East Asian states] are not familiar with the phenomenon of indigenous internationalism and may not even comprehend the legal relationship between some indigenous groups and their government, such as land-claim and self-government agreements” (Lackenbauer & Manicom 2013: 5).

Finally, by bringing Asian states in the Council, that is, also their “expertise and money” (The Economist 2013), Canada can expect to get considerable inputs in the field of Arctic research. Tesar, member of the WWF Global Arctic Programme coordinating team¹⁸, notes that in the observership bids the preservation of the Arctic environment stands often very high among the Arctic priorities of the applicants (Tesar 2015). Significantly, a few weeks after the meeting in Kiruna, China and the Nordic

¹⁸ WWF has observer status, as intergovernmental organisation, at the Arctic Council.

states collaborated on the opening of a multilateral China-Nordic Research Centre on Arctic issues (Sharma 2013). Lackenbauer and Manicom see Canada as a leader in Arctic science and forecast promising relations with China and South Korea (Lackenbauer & Manicom 2013b: 15). Canada is investing in the construction of the Canadian High Arctic Research Station (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 2015) and South Korea and China each allocate around CDN\$ 60 million on polar research every year (Lackenbauer & Manicom 2013b: 15). For instance, four months after its admission as observer, South Korean scientists joined Canadian and American experts in the Beaufort Sea Geoscience Research Survey, and South Korea's own-built icebreaker "Aaron" participated in the project (Bennett 2013). Canada has also stated its interest in the contributions of Singapore to the Council, particularly on Arctic shipping infrastructures (Government of Canada 2013d).

Section 4.5 has set a first layer of substantiation for the leading argument in chapter 5, namely that, as neoliberal institutionalism assumes that gains of international cooperation will be broader than just inter-state security, so the involvement of East Asian states in the governance of the Arctic through their admission as observers in the Arctic Council can be beneficial for Canada under a variety of aspects, including the economic implications considered above.

4.6 Summary and implications

Chapter 4 has focused on domestic interests and institutions around the economic development of Canada's North and, related to this, the involvement of East Asia.

With regards to my research question, the message from Canada's domestic interests has emerged more visibly: East Asian investments may well fit in Canada's North both in structural terms (Canada's Arctic is rich in natural resources and in need of investments for opening up that capital) and, more importantly, in terms of the preferences of domestic stakeholders. On one end, those of the executive, that accelerated on the implementation of economic policies to facilitate the extraction of

natural resources; on the other end, those of the Northern communities, whose comparatively underdeveloped living conditions require increased levels of investments and development. Overall, then, while one may debate –as I have done at the end of section 4.3 – the extent to which the government’s and the Northerners’ understanding of development may actually match, it is evident that natural resource-driven growth in Canada’s Arctic (and East Asian participation as one of its possible corollaries) is welcomed.

Section 4.2 has presented the current proportions of the East Asian economic engagement in Canada, and section 4.5 has made explicit the positive link between East Asian investments and Canada’s consent to the East Asian observership in the Arctic Council at the Kiruna meeting, in that having East Asian countries sit at the Council table may foster Canada’s ties with those countries.

With regards to domestic institutions, in section 4.3 I have found that devolution was not as decisive as originally hypothesized in explaining Canada’s welcome to the East Asian observers, for it seems that the connection between devolution and East Asia – that I have placed in easier conditions for investments in the North that would result from devolution – is far from being clear-cut.

5 Harper's Canada in Arctic international politics: the benefits of multilateralism and the observer rules in the Arctic Council

Chapters 3 and 4 have indicated possible domestic drivers behind Canada's consent to the admission of East Asian observers at Kiruna. Chapter 3, centred on the analysis of national actors' preferences, has found that the openly hostile façade of the government's politics on the Arctic resounds electoral calculations. In chapter 3 I have also suggested that the toning down of Harper's domestic narrative on the North and the greater emphasis on development for the North may have made the domestic political setting more poised to the case of international Arctic cooperation represented by the admission of East Asian states as observers in the Arctic Council. Chapter 4 has found that there is good evidence to support the argument for Canada's national interest in the economic involvement of East Asian stakeholders in the development of the North, and thus in the admission of East Asian states as observers in the Arctic Council. Considering the institutional side of the domestic analysis, chapter 4 has also examined the role that the institutional phenomenon of devolution in Canada's North might have in favoring that development, concluding that, for the time being, this is not case.

While chapters 3 and 4 have looked inwards, this chapter builds on the premises of neoliberal institutionalism and investigates Canada's outwards messages, that is on the stage of international Arctic politics, building on both explicit statements of foreign policy or moves of Arctic diplomacy, and taking into account both interests and institutions. This chapter will make a number of necessary references to Canada's domestic politics and Harper's domestic conduct, possibly proving even more clearly Putnam's and Milner's main argument that is never entirely feasible to draw a neat line between domestic politics and international relations.

Overall, what this chapter brings to my research question is that the continuity in Canada's position on the admission of East Asian observers is greater than one might believe if only examining the domestic level of the analysis, so that, as Manicom and Lackenbauer (2013b) have concluded, East Asian substantially fits with Canada's international Arctic strategy.

Section 5.1 will discuss Canada's international profile in the Arctic under Harper and how Canada's circumpolar interests can be assisted by multilateralism in Arctic politics. Three parallel empirical cases (Canada's program for the Arctic Council chairmanship, the Canadian veto on the EU's observership application in the Arctic Council, the Canadian foreign policy messages on the Arctic) and a more in-depth section (5.2) on the "behind the scenes" at Kiruna, will clarify the extent to which Canada can be said to be reluctant to admit new non-Arctic observers, and will substantiate the argument that Canada is aware of the benefits of international Arctic cooperation. Section 5.3 will treat the "international institutional side" of my research question, and point out how the Council member states were able to institutionalize their "power position" in the governance of the Arctic, with Canada advancing its specific understanding of Arctic multilateralism.

5.1 Harper's Canada and multilateralism in the Arctic

Paralleling the structure of former two chapters, this section will start off by placing the analysis of the international drivers behind Canada's decision at Kiruna in the broader discussion on the specific profile of Canada's foreign policy under the Conservatives. Again, as for domestic politics, Harper was eager to put his very own stamp on the making of Canada's foreign policy, signalling a break with the past. While this has at first resulted in discontinuous planning, experience eventually made clear which line of foreign policy could best advance the international priorities of Harper's Canada, to the extent that "Harper's way of foreign policy" is now delineated.

This logic may well also apply to international cooperation in the Arctic and to the Arctic Council. In spite of the empirical record registering contradictory moves, it emerges that Canada's attitude towards circumpolar cooperation has adjusted in a positive sense towards circumpolar cooperation and the inclusion of new non-Arctic observers in the Arctic Council governance that, though not being as manifest and "publicized" as that of the Nordic countries, is at least distinguishable. After all, as neoliberal institutionalism would predict, Canada's international interests are best served when the ties with its circumpolar allies are functioning, considering also Canada's assumption of the chairmanship of the Council in 2013.

While this is the overarching message, the case for Canada's Arctic cooperation is complicated by at least two factors.

On the one side, as chapter 3 has discussed extensively, Harper created a political situation at home whereby advocating for circumpolar cooperation does not "sell" as much as raising the spectre of Arctic confrontation. As a consequence, the signs of Canada's Arctic multilateralism often pass unnoticed and do not catch the public eye, and the grim picture that follows is one where Canada is largely a unilateral player.

On the other side, Canada's foreign policy in the Arctic should be considered against the fact that allowing Indigenous participation in Arctic affairs has traditionally been a pivotal concern to Canada, and possibly being stronger under Harper's "domestication" of the North. While one could take Canada's opposition to the EU application for observership and the outline of Canada's Arctic Council chairmanship program as examples of Canada's exclusivist interpretation of Arctic governance, it seems to me that they might indicate that Indigenous issues wield real influence in the elaboration of Canada's international Arctic strategy. Therefore, I argue that Canada's hesitancy on letting powerful non-Arctic observers in the Council at the international level may stem from caution, that is, anxiety that their entry may impinge on the efficiency of the Council in general and on the Indigenous status the Council in particular, rather than from a genuine prejudice against the East Asian countries.

I will substantiate my argument by looking at how Harper's stamp on foreign policy has played out with regards to international politics in the Arctic and which implications this has for the admission of the East Asian observers under Harper's Canada perspective.

Refuelling the Conservatives' political identity is not only an effort of domestic politics – whose implications have been presented in chapter 3 – but it also involves a substantial makeover at the international level. Accordingly, several Canadian commentators (Ibbitson 2014; Jeffrey 2015; Plouffe 2014) have explained Canada's foreign policy under Harper's executive as “transformative” (Plouffe 2014), a great deviation from the country's practice of international liberalisms. Ibbitson writes of a “Big Break”, “the most radical shift [...] in foreign policy since the Second World War” (Ibbitson 2014). The Canadian researcher and Arctic expert Plouffe (2014) and the legal scholar Byers (2015b[interview]) have argued that under Harper's leadership, it appears that economic priorities and trade policy dictate Canada's foreign policy, and Plouffe has observed that Canada is more concentrated on “domestic and continental issues that legitimize the need for enhanced military capacities in the North since they have been, from [Harper's] perspective, neglected under the Liberals (Plouffe 2014). And at a public event in 2012, the former president of Québec Marois stated: “Quebeckers no longer recognize themselves in Canada's foreign policy, which has turned its back to a tradition of openness, mediation, and multilateralism” (as quoted in Cousineau, 2012).

For instance, Harper's Canada steep decline in the involvement of United Nations peacekeeping operations – at a faster rate than any others developed countries (Shepard 2014) – has raised bewilderment, especially in light of Canada's long peacekeeping tradition (The Economist 2014; Ibbitson 2014, Shepard 2014). While Canada's 14th Prime Minister Pearson – awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 – is considered the “international father” of peacekeeping, the Conservatives have strived to recast Canada as a warrior nation (The Economist 2014). With the publication of “Canada First Defence Strategy” in 2008 (Canada First Defence

Strategy 2008), Harper confirmed the growing trend in military spending, in 2011 at its peak since the end of the Second World War (Robinson 2011).

Massie and Rousell (2012) have even branded a new concept – “neocontinentalism” – to describe the emerging dominant ideas in Canada’s foreign policy.

Discussing the new profile of Canada’s international strategy with regards to Arctic politics, Plouffe looks at the episode of the 2010 Arctic meeting in Chelsea and concludes that Chelsea represents a grinding halt for Canada’s status in the Arctic, leaving behind the image of Canada as a “lone ranger” in the North (Plouffe 2014). Plouffe has an overtly pessimistic view: “Canada’s image as a leader in the Arctic has continued to depress as an outcome of Stephen Harper’s “transformative” foreign policy, clearly dominated by unilateral actions that have implications on Canada’s international relations, reputation and image in the world” (Plouffe 2014).

While I agree with Plouffe that the circumstances of the case represented a big rebuff of Canada’s Arctic aspirations, I do not believe, as I will argue right below, that they should be generalized to the whole Canada’s Arctic foreign policy and resolve, as Plouffe does, that Canada’s Arctic foreign policy is, to a large extent, falling apart (Plouffe as quoted in Quinn 2014a)

No doubt that Chelsea - Canada’s last big attempt to prove international leadership in the Arctic before the Arctic Council chairmanship in 2013 – had been largely disappointing. In March 2010, Canadian Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon brought together the five Arctic coastal states (Denmark, Russia, Norway, the United States, and Canada) in the Canadian municipality of Chelsea for discussing a number of Arctic issues, such as the delimitation of the continental shelf and regulations on the Arctic Ocean. The high-level political meeting was intended as the continuation of the so-called “Arctic Five” initiative that in 2008 had generated the Ilulissat Declaration. The five Arctic coastal states then agreed to respect the law of the sea in the settlement of competing claims over territory and resources in the Arctic (Ilulissat Declaration 2008), and, more importantly, concluded that there was “no need to develop a new comprehensive international legal regime to govern the Arctic Ocean” (Ilulissat

Declaration 2008), thus rejecting speculations around a treaty for the Arctic on the model of Antarctica

At the time, Tom Axworthy, who has served as Principal Secretary to Canada's Liberal Prime Minister Trudeau, applauded Canada for initiating the meeting in what he considered a sign of serious commitment to the Arctic after years of "benign neglect" (Axworthy, T. 2010). Still, the decision to include only five member states, bypassing Finland, Sweden, Iceland and the indigenous representatives had raised perplexities (Axworthy, T. 2010; Exner-Pirot 2010), especially because it seemed as if Canada was disregarding the Arctic Council, established out of its own inspiration (Dodds 2011: 373; Pedersen 2012: 151).

Iceland had issued a statement denouncing that "the exclusion of some undermines the importance of the Council" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Iceland 2010), and the president of ICC Canada Smith had commented that this "essentially shut down meaningful dialogue on the whole Arctic" (ICC 2010). While the foreign ministers of Denmark, Russia and Norway had not posed for the group picture at the end of the meeting, the most severe backlash had possibly come from the United States. Secretary of State Clinton had decided to leave Chelsea earlier than scheduled, and in her closing remarks she expressed her concerns about the Canadian organization of the event. Clinton said:

"Significant international discussions on Arctic issues should include those who have legitimate interests in the region. And I hope the Arctic will always showcase our ability to work together, not create new divisions" (as quoted in Blanchfield 2010).

However, limiting the analysis to the Chelsea summit and drawing from it whatever interpretation of Canada's Arctic foreign policy seems "impulsive", especially because, as soon as one is able to zoom out, a more complex picture emerges.

First of all, Canada's much contested hosting of the Arctic summit in Chelsea was apparently very different from its earlier position in Ilulissat. As reported by a 2008 US briefing on the meeting made public by WikiLeaks:

“The Canadian view was that if the other three Arctic Council members had an interest, it was better to invite them. Keeping the group limited to the five littoral states also risks appearing to exclude the indigenous permanent participants of the Arctic Council” (WikiLeaks 2008).

Second of all, it is at odds with the message that stands out from both the “Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy” (2010), released just a few months before the event in Chelsea, and the “Achievements under Canada’s Northern Strategy” (2010) published in the very same year, where Canada had reaffirmed the centrality of the Council as “the primary forum for collaboration among the eight Arctic states” (Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy 2010: 9). Finally, it is certainly dissonant with the 2013 state of Arctic politics: the Arctic Council when Canada started its Chairmanship in 2013 was a forum of renewed vigor, after that the issue of observers (at least for the more talked-about East Asian applications), and in full action. The Council had negotiated two binding agreements - the 2011 “Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic” and the 2013 “Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution”, and opened its permanent Secretariat in the Norwegian town of Tromsø, which has been welcomed as an initiative to strengthen circumpolar cooperation (Sellheim 2012: 68)

I argue, therefore, that there are good elements to believe that, far from representing Harper’s dismissal of the Arctic Council and Arctic cooperation, the Chelsea meeting was a misstep in Harper Conservatives’ Arctic foreign policy where, like other aspects of their international strategy, they had to “learn-by-doing”. This is also a point that Ibbitson, leading political journalist in Canada and senior fellow at the Canadian “Centre for International Governance Innovation”, touches upon when elaborating on the broader issue of the evolution of Canada’s international politics under Harper. Ibbitson discusses that, in post-electoral “frenzy” to distance themselves from the Liberals, Harper’s first moves on the international stage were, most of all, incoherent (Ibbitson 2014). This included, for example, a woeful cooling down of the relations with China. Ibbitson notes:

“[The Conservatives] stumbled and bumbled and reacted and back-tracked. As he became more experienced on the world stage, Harper got a better sense of which multilateral forums advanced Canadian interests – the G20, G8 and the Arctic Council, for example – and which were mostly talking shops – such as the United Nations, the Commonwealth and le Francophonie” (Ibbitson 2014).

Canada’s positive reassessment of the Arctic Council is not dissimilar from what has happened with the rebuilding of relations with China over the last few years. Evans has described this development from a situation – at the beginning of Harper’s first term as Canada’s Prime Minister- in which the preferred line in Ottawa was that Canada’s future partner in Asia would be India, for China was perceived as “a totalitarian country with nuclear weapons” (Evans 2014). At the present time, according to Evans (2011: 24), “the Conservative policy [has] returned very close to where Paul Martin [...] left it five years [ago].”

The benefits of circumpolar multilateralism

Building on analysis conducted so far, I will now show how a well-functioning Arctic Council can serve Canadian interests on the international scene.

For Canada the Arctic Council is, firstly, a matter of leadership at large. Exner-Pirot, editor of the Arctic Yearbook, reflects on the fact that, with the exception of the “North America Free Trade Agreement” (NAFTA), Canada is quite isolated in terms of regionalism (Exner-Pirot 2011:11). Therefore, she argues that circumpolar relations offers Canada the chance to “to participate in a region of increasing significance and thus generate influence it would have little opportunity to do otherwise” (Exner-Pirot 2011:11).

In this sense, Exner-Pirot speaks of “the benefits of circumpolarity” for Canada (Exner-Pirot 2011: 9), and points out how Canada could well be the country, among the Arctic states, with most to gain from enduring circumpolar relationships, with Canada’s Arctic being “rich in just about everything except human population” (Exner-Pirot, 2011: 11). Specifically, she numbers economic benefits (Canada has the

occasion to revitalize the potential of its North), environmental benefits (Canada can contribute to regional environmental legislation on the Arctic), and international political benefits (most notably regarding increased regional ties in the Arctic and a positive spill over effect into bilateral relations with Arctic partners) (Exner-Pirot 2011: 9).

But the Arctic Council also entails something of a national pride for Canada, given that the Council, which is considered today the Arctic's main policy-shaping organization of Arctic issues (Axworthy et al. 2012; Koivurova 2009; Stokke 2011), originated out of Canada's own initiative. Canada's Prime Minister Mulroney first put on the table the proposal for an intergovernmental circumpolar forum in 1989, the Council finally coming into existence with the Ottawa Declaration in 1996 under Canada's Prime Minister Chretien (Exner-Pirot 2011: 17).

Secondly, the specific occurrence of the Arctic Council chairmanship represented an extremely valuable opportunity for Canada to "conduct the Arctic orchestra" (Fenge 2012). In May 2013, the opening of the Canadian Arctic Council chairmanship term came when literally all eyes were on the Council. In the midst of media narratives charged with the rhetoric of a "politically hot" Arctic, the East Asian observer application and the controversial position of the EU after the ban on seal products excited an unprecedented interest around the meeting in Kiruna. Indeed, a comparative analysis over international news sources of the phrase "Arctic Council" through time shows that the hype over the Arctic had never been so high as in 2013 (Steinberg et al. 2014: 277).

Facilitating Arctic cooperation, in general but also in the specific circumstance of the meeting in Kiruna, also making substantial steps on the admission of new observers, could thus give Canada significant "Arctic momentum" and help convey a sense of purpose around its chairmanship program (Pelaudeix 2013).

As for observers in the Arctic Council, one of Ibbitson's political analyses is, again, particularly timely. Ibbitson writes: "[For Arctic politics], like so many other aspects

of this Conservative government, bellicose and ideological rhetoric often masks a competent and accommodating reality” (Ibbitson 2011).

The possible entry of new observers had actually been a subject of high-level discussions in Canada, on both academic and governmental levels. In a report published in May 2013 in preparation of Canada’s Arctic Council chairmanship (House of Commons Canada 2013), the Canadian “Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development” heard from a number of experts and concluded by recommending, among others, that Canada would be ready to support those applications for observership that complied with the observer criteria in the Council (House of Commons Canada 2013: 19). On this point, Byers, one of the specialists consulted by the Committee, had remarked:

“I think we should *push for the admission* of both the European Union and China as permanent observers at the Arctic Council. The reason I say this is that any international organization, any international forum, is only as important as the people in the room. *We want the Arctic Council to be the centre of Arctic diplomacy, Arctic governance. It is a compliment to us that the European Union and China want to be there*” (as quoted in House of Commons Canada 2013: 4, emphasis added).

In the same way, in April 2013, the academic conference organized by the Canadian “Observatoire de la politique et de la sécurité de l’Arctique” concluded almost unanimously that, unlike the EU, there were high chances for the East Asian countries to be admitted as observers at the meeting in Kiruna (George 2013a), and no mention came of a specific Canadian opposition on the issue (George 2013a).

As early as 2009 Lackenbauer had warned that Harper’s “use or lose it” fuss on the North was frustrating Canada’s international ambitions in the Arctic, creating a “*false separation* between sovereignty-security concerns and a stable circumpolar world” (Lackenbauer 2009: 55, emphasis added). The main problem, according to Byers (2015b [interview]), boils down to the fact that the Arctic seems to be for the Conservatives primarily a matter of domestic, rather than international, politics. This has resulted in a situation whereby Canada’s international Arctic strategy is either

biased towards national concerns – as in the case with the last Canadian Arctic Council chairmanship program – or dwarfed by the Conservatives’ aggressive Arctic talks at home, that most often make their way to the media.

The section above has supported my neoliberal institutional interpretation that multilateralism in Arctic politics and the entry of East Asian observers in the Arctic Council – that, as section 5.4 will show more clearly, reinforces the Council – is substantially advantageous to Canada’s international leverage in the Arctic.¹⁹ This section has done so in both general terms and, more specifically, by “scaling back” the significance of the meeting in Chelsea, possibly the most quoted example of Canada’s Arctic unilateralism. This section has also demonstrated that Canada’s international profile in the Arctic is more “competent” and coherent than the hot-tempered domestic rhetoric of the Conservatives.

The next three subsections will further my argument from three different perspectives. I will first focus on Canada’s program for the chairmanship and on Canada’s stand on the EU’s observership application and, as chapter 3 has done for domestic politics, I will clarify some of the reasons behind Canada’s insecurity on opening up the Council to East Asian observers. In accordance with neoliberal institutionalism, I will discuss that Canada has no power concerns about having such a decision made by the Council, but that it is rather a matter of Canada’s traditional understanding of the Arctic as the “area of expertise” of the Northerners who live in it. The last subsection will indicate that the positive reassessment of Arctic multilateralism emerges also by Canada’s international strategy papers on the Arctic.

Canada’s chairmanship of the Arctic Council

In May 2013, the Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna marked the start of the Canadian Chairmanship of Arctic Council, the second Canadian cycle after Canada served as the first chair in 1996, under the overarching theme of “development for the people of the North” (Development for the People of the North 2013). The Canadian program starts

¹⁹ The reader will remember that, for keeping the consistency of my argument, I have touched upon the multilateral benefits with regards to polar science in section 4.6.

off with the meaningful assertion that “Canada’s Chairmanship is putting Northerners first” (Development for the People of the North 2013), with the focus being threefold: responsible Arctic resource development, safe Arctic shipping, and sustainable circumpolar communities (Development for the People of the North 2013). In addition, Canada commits to cooperation on strengthening the Arctic Council, for, as the opportunities and challenges for the Arctic region grow, so “must” the Council evolve (Development for the People of the North 2013). Specifically:

“Canada is working collaboratively with its Arctic Council partners to strengthen the Council. The aim is to enhance the capacity of the Permanent Participants organisations, improve the Council’s coordination and maximize efficiencies” (Development for the People of the North 2013).

Canada’s explicit reorientation of the chairmanship agenda on sustainable development is interesting. The “Ottawa Declaration” prescribes for the Arctic Council the double mandate of “sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic” (Arctic Council 1996), and yet, since the inauguration of the Council, the environment has had more prominence in the work of the forum, “both through its communications and in its working group outputs” (Exner-Pirot 2014a: 2). Indeed, this is quite a long environmentally-focused tradition if one considers also that the Arctic Council was built on the 1991 “Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy” (AEPS), chiefly concerned with environmental issues (Exner-Pirot 2014a: 12). Moreover, under the Canadian chairmanship and for the first time in the history of the Council, an Arctic Indigenous inhabitant, Leona Aglukkaq, took the chair of the Council. According to Exner-Pirot, these two innovations are in line with the Canadian practice, both domestically and in circumpolar politics, of emphasizing “inclusion and empowerment, as well as resource development” (Exner-Pirot 2014a: 12).

The main criticism of the Canadian Chairmanship – that, at the time of writing, is on its way to conclusion – revolves around the fact that the Chairmanship, especially in its guiding principle of “development for the people of the North”, would be aimed

mostly at advancing Canada's own domestic interests over those of the Council at large (George 2013b; Quinn 2014b).

In a press release issued in April 2015 by DFATD (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2015a), Aglukkaq stated to be "proud of Canada's achievements at the Arctic Council, which promote sustainable economic development and improves the living conditions of Northerners" (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2015). The Canadian Chairmanship has no doubt earned general validation from Canada's Arctic communities, which struggle with sluggish growth rates. For instance, former Nunavut Premier Aariak has greeted the development focus of the Council as an opportunity to act on issues of regional relevance to Canada's North (as quoted in Nunatsiaq News 2013), and approval came also from Canada's Northern Premiers at the high-level conference "Passing the Arctic Council Torch" in September 2014 (Exner-Pirot 2014b).

Elsewhere, however, the business slant of the Chairmanship has been looked at with suspicion and has sounded displaced, not only because it is dangerously close to Harper's poor reputation for environmental issues, but also because it seems to be tailored to Canada's Arctic own interests (George 2013b). Some have pointed to the gap in the level of development between the Arctic regions of Canada and, for example, the Scandinavian countries, where the growth rates are remarkable, arguing that it is difficult to see how Canada's interpretation of Northern development can match with that of the Scandinavian realities (Quinn 2013b). And Lackenbauer has added: "Russia generates a sizable percentage of its gross domestic product north of the Arctic Circle [20 %], so the idea that northern development should be treated as separate from national prosperity more generally also does not resonate (as quoted in Quinn 2014)".

This is an argument that I have also found from the Norwegian side ([interview with a Norwegian official] 2015) and at the level of the Council Working Groups (AMAP²⁰

²⁰ AMPA (Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme) is one of the six Working Groups of the Arctic Council.

2015 [interview]). Also, the Norwegian official highlighted that after taking the chairmanship Canada changed the top level of its Arctic administration, giving special emphasis to the fact that Aglukkaq did not come from the Foreign Affairs Department, reading it as a sign of Canada's preference for domestic over international diplomacy. Yet a Danish official has observed that it is quite understandable that the Arctic Council chairing country would look at its domestic issues when taking the chairmanship ([Danish official] 2015), and the official did not thus raise explicit worries around the Canadian Chairmanship ([Danish official] 2015)

Looking at the Canadian chairmanship program, the English researcher Willis has spoken of “an Arctic Indigenous Canadian vision” (Willis 2013), praising the fact that, contrary to the mainstream (Southern Canadian) interpretation of the North, the program seems to be genuinely stemming from Northerners and targeted to Northerners (Willis 2013). Indeed, recouping the central role that Indigenous people had for Canada in the establishment of the Council, Aglukkaq has stressed her Inuit origin and stated:

“I will bring a different perspective to the [Arctic Council] table, a perspective that in my view has not been heard in the 16 years since the Council was formed” (as quoted in Koring 2013).

Unsurprisingly, then, introducing Canada's chairmanship at the “Arctic Frontiers” event in January 2013, Aglukkaq's focus was all on “the North” (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2013a), and it looked as if she had a limited audience in mind, neglecting non-Arctic states and including only “the eight Arctic Council countries and the six Permanent Participants” (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2013a).

This, and the particular phrasing of theme of the Canadian Arctic Council Chairmanship – “development *for the people of the North*” (Development for the People of the North 2013, emphasis added) gave then the impression that Canada has a “circumscribed understanding” of the Arctic Council, and yet one that is not exclusivist. I agree with Willis (2013) on the fact that Canada seems to be open in

principle to non-Arctic actors, but only as long as Northerners will be put at the frontline. Aglukkaq has often stressed that “the Arctic Council was formed by northerners, for northerners” (as quoted in Boyd 2013).

This subsection has introduced the theme of “Northerners First” in the analysis of Canada’s Arctic international interests. How this relates to the specific admission of the East Asian observers at Kiruna will be highlighted in the next subsection, as I argue that the dispute over the EU application is emblematic.

The EU’s observership bid

Regarding the EU’s application for observership in the Arctic Council, the Kiruna declaration stated:

“The Arctic Council receives the application of the EU for observer status affirmatively, but defers a final decision on implementation until the Council ministers are agreed by consensus that the concerns of Council members, addressed by the President of the European Commission in his letter of 8 May are resolved, with the understanding that the EU may observe Council proceedings until such time as the Council acts on the letter’s proposal” (Arctic Council 2013b).²¹

The Council had already scrutinized the EU bid in 2009, failing to reach a consensus decision (the Council had then decided to “continue discussing the role of observers in the Arctic Council” (Arctic Council 2009)). Controversies on the admission mounted over the proposal from the EU’s Directorate-General for Environment for the implementation of a ban on the importation of seal products (European Parliament, Council of the European Union 2009). The ban – to which had been added an exemption for goods manufactured for cultural, educational or ceremonial purposes – was then approved in 2010 after the agreement between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers (European Parliament, Council of the European Union 2009; European Commission 2015).

²¹ It is important to point out that the East Asian states and the EU were “competing” in two different categories: non-Arctic states vs. inter-governmental organisation (Steinberg & Dodds 2015).

Among Arctic Council member states, most sensitive to the ban were Denmark, Norway, and Canada, for they feared that the ban would lead to a severe discrimination to the traditional ways of living of their Aboriginal communities (Østhagen 2014: 78). While Denmark relented in its opposition after the introduction of the exemption (Østhagen 2014: 82), both Norway and Canada expressed determination to appeal to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (WTO 2015), proving to have, however, different views on the EU observership to the Council in occasion of the 2009 Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in Tromsø.

In a move that some have seen as “favouring multilateralism” (Bennett 2009b), Norway endorsed granting the EU observership status. In the days of the meeting, Norwegian Foreign Minister Støre had reportedly stated: “Norway shares that view [on the seal ban] with Canada. But for Norway, that's yet another reason to invite the observers in” (as quoted in Bennett 2009b).

On the contrary, Canada had been rather vocal on obstructing the European application to the Arctic Council because of the seal ban, and it seemed clear that Canada had used its veto power to block the discussions. Commenting on the outcome of the meeting, Canadian Foreign Minister Cannon echoed the concerns from both the Premier of Nunavut and the Inuit Circumpolar Council and stated that: “Canada does not feel that the European Union, at this stage, has the required sensitivity to be able to acknowledge the Arctic Council, as well as its membership, and so therefore I’m opposed to it” (as quoted in CBC News 2009a).

At Kiruna, the EU had received a new formal deferral. Again, the primary cause is most likely to be found in Canada’s opposition (Koring 2013). Unlike Tromsø, on the occasion of the Council gathering in Kiruna, Canada’s representatives were less emphatic on the issue. Aglukkaq did not give details on whether Canada had an active role on the results of the discussions, and stated: “Canada supports the consensus decision of the Arctic Council’s ministers today” (as quoted in Bell 2013). However, the president of the Canadian organisation Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Terry Audla, remarked that he was “pleased to hear that the Arctic Council chair joins other

Canadian Inuit leaders in opposition to the EU's application" (as quoted in Bell 2013). Also, according to the long experienced political consultant Fenge (2014: 25), the "8 May letter" mentioned in the Kiruna declaration regarding the EU was specifically addressed to Canada.

A significant step towards the resolution of the Canadian-EU disagreement over the seal ban issue came in August 2014, when the EU Commission gave approval to a joint statement by Canada and the EU stating "cooperation to enable access to the EU of seal products that result from hunts traditionally conducted" (European Commission 2014).

There is some clear symbolism attached to the case of the Canadian veto on the EU application (Exner-Pirot 2013; Østhagen 2013), one that may also extend to the incident of the East Asian observers.

On the one hand, it confirms that, when it comes to outside interests in the Arctic, Canada is particularly circumspect. The high degree of politicization that the Arctic has in Canada's domestic politics – to the extent that Canada views the Arctic "as a national or domestic priority in the first instance" (Willis & Depledge 2015: 26) – means the odds that foreign policy decisions will be taken through the lens of domestic politics are higher, especially when sensitive issues like the EU seal ban are at stake. As the Norwegian researcher Østhagen (2014) has written comparing Norway's and Canada's stands on the EU bid for Arctic Council observership, this is an "example of how competing internal interests have unpredictable consequences for foreign policy" (Østhagen 2014: 48). For Canada, the seal ban issue is a matter of both electoral accountability – the domestic pressures from the Inuit on Aglukkaq, a Inuk herself, were extremely high (Dawson 2013) – and sincere concern for the audibility of its Northerners (Exner-Pirot 2013).

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight the fact that Canada does not rule out, in principle, the possibility for involvement of new non-Arctic actors in the Arctic Council. Addressing the Economic Club of Canada in June 2013, Aglukkaq showed a rather positive attitude and stated:

“Observers have an opportunity to better understanding the impact that their policies have on the life of Northerners. I look forward to working with the EU to try and bridge the gap between our two sides on this issue” (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2013b).

On the other hand, the EU case may well be read as Canada’s attempt to showcase leadership in the Arctic, and cement the overall message of its Arctic Council Chairmanship, all centred on Northerners. This is a point made also by both Exner-Pirot (2013) (“an excuse for Russia and Canada to exert their prominence in Arctic relations by excluding the EU for as long as was politically feasible”) and Østhagen (2013) (“the seal ban issue thus becomes pivotal to Canada’s self-portrayal as an Arctic nation”).

Again, from Aglukkaq’s speech before the Economic Club of Canada: “[The decision on the EU *under Canada’s leadership* [means that] when other countries make decisions that affect the quality of living in Northern communities [...], we will not hesitate to speak up” (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2013b, emphasis added).

In this subsection I have been able to single out a clear element – the preoccupation for the centrality of Northerners in the governance of the Arctic – that, with regards to Canada’s circumpolar interests, may explain much of the Canadian unease at the admission of new observers (this will come back in the discussion on the Arctic Council institutions in section 5.4). Canada has insisted that respect for the Arctic indigenous communities is an utmost priority and, coherently, has showed caution when non-Arctic powers have expressed their willingness to be included in Arctic affairs. However, this has turned to open opposition only in the case of the EU because of the European seal ban.

“Mixed messages”

This section builds on extracts from Canadian documents of Arctic foreign policy to argue that the Canada’s formal international stance on the Arctic does not echo the

government's domestic excitement over the military protection of its Arctic borders, thus creating, according to Lackenbauer a series of "mixed messages" (Lackenbauer 2011a). Yet internationally, Lackenbauer (2011a) sees a positive trend of reconciliation with Arctic cooperation.

In July 2009, presenting "Canada's Northern Strategy", Foreign Affairs Minister Cannon declared: "We're not going down a road toward confrontation. Indeed, we're going down *a road toward co-operation and collaboration. That is the Canadian way.* And that's the way my other colleagues around the [Arctic Council] table have chosen to go as well" (CBC News 2009b, emphasis added).

The "Northern Strategy" (2009) retains pledges to put "more boots on the Arctic tundra, more ships in the icy water and a better eye -in- the -sky" (Canada's Northern Strategy 2009: 9) but at the same time states that disputes with Arctic countries are "well -managed and pose no sovereignty or defence challenges for Canada" (Canada's Northern Strategy 2009: 9). There is no sign of the "use it or lose it" scenario evoked by the Conservatives at home, and instead the white paper strengthens a message of collaboration between Canada and its Arctic neighbors.

Similarly, the 2010 "Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy", though resounding "sovereignty first" tones in claiming that "the first and most important pillar [...] is the exercise of our sovereignty over the Far North" (Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy 2010: 4), does not number defence initiatives among Canada's international priorities. The "Statement" reiterates that territorial disagreements in the region were "well-managed" (Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy 2010: 7), and concludes optimistically that "cooperation, diplomacy and respect for international law have always been Canada's preferred approach in the Arctic" (Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy 2010: 26).

The variety of evidences presented above has shown the extent to which Canada's circumpolar interest can answer my research question. It emerges that Harper's Canada is far from turning its back on the Arctic Council, as some (Axworthy, T. 2010; Plouffe 2014) have claimed looking at Canada's leadership at Kiruna, and that Harper is willing to embrace circumpolar cooperation to the extent it furthers Canada's

position on the circumpolar stage. And this also involves the admission of observers, on which, contrary to Canada's national dominant narrative on the Arctic, Canada's international Arctic strategy is more openly a promising one. Significantly, none of the Canadian academics (Chater 2015 [interview]; Greaves 2015 [interview]; Lasserre 2015 [interview]²²) or experts of Canada's Arctic politics (Fenge 2015 [interview]) I have spoken with would say to be "surprised" by Canada's decision at Kiruna, and Fenge suggested to me not to make "too much of a big deal out of it" (Fenge 2015 [interview]).

More than any other Arctic states, Canada's international practice in the Arctic appears to be informed by a "literal interpretation" of the "Ottawa Declaration", in the sense that the Arctic Council is first and foremost of Northerners and for Northerners. It seems to me, then, that from the Canadian perspective observers are welcomed in only as long as they can assist Northern interests.

5.2 Canada and the Arctic Council peer pressure

In the aftermath of the Arctic Council meeting in Kiruna and amidst the many commentaries, some concluded that the declaration adopted in Kiruna had been the outcome of a great deal of peer pressure exerted on Canada and Russia within the Council (Lunde 2014: 44), and others (Dodds and Steinberg 2012: 109; Solli et al. 2013: 256) wrote that the discussions at Kiruna had been pushed until very late at night. Peer pressure, that I interpret here as the "mutual adjustment" of interests that Axelrod and Keohane (1985: 226) consider as a catalyst for durable international institutions, is a leading concept in neoliberal institutionalism and should thus be analysed with regards to Canada's decision at Kiruna.

That the meeting in Kiruna would raise sensitive issues was evident from the fact that, in the days leading to the summit, only a few of the representatives of the member states had been open about their countries' stands on the admission of observers. On

²² Lasserre has further elaborated that "the only "state" Ottawa did not want to see admitted was the European Union" (Lasserre 2015 [interview]).

the eve of the meeting, Norwegian Foreign Minister Eide lamented that Canada, the US, and Russia had been silent on the subject, hoping “to clarify this as fast as possible” (as quoted in Macdonald & Jervell 2013). Although no official statement had been made by US officials, somewhat telling is the fact that the “US National Strategy for the Arctic Region” (2013), published just a few days before the meeting, read:

“A growing number of non-Arctic states and numerous non-state actors have expressed increased interest in the Arctic region. The United States and other Arctic nations should seek to work with other states and entities to advance common objectives in the Arctic region in a manner that protects Arctic states’ national interests and resource” (US Government, National Strategy for the Arctic Region 2013: 10).

Also, as early as June 2012, on the margins of a meeting in Tromsø with the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Clinton had spoken of the “opportunity” that the AC had to engage non-Arctic into the forum and help better their understanding of the Arctic (as quoted in Bennett 2012). And in spite of Obama reportedly still “undecided” (as quoted in Goldenberg 2013), a US diplomat was quoted saying just before the meeting that Kerry considered China a “responsible applicant” (as quoted in Ghattas 2013).

According to Pedersen, the American stance on the governance of the Arctic Council, including the admission of observers, should be understood as having in mind what he identifies as a distinct shift in the US policy on the Arctic (Pedersen 2012: 152). Pedersen argues that, since the inception of the Council, the US position has evolved through the three main “debates” that occurred among the member states on the role of the forum (Pedersen 2012).

In the first phase leading to the signing of the Ottawa Declaration in 1996, the American preferences clearly leaned towards the Arctic Council as an informal arena with competences and limited to determined environmental issues and a generally low political status. Significantly, the US snubbed the founding meeting of the Council by announcing that it would not send the Secretary of State.

In the second phase, discussions on the mandate of the so-called “Arctic Five” had the US, Russia and Denmark on the same side in defending the choice to open the meeting only to the Arctic coastal state. Denmark’s foreign minister, commenting on the exclusion of the three Arctic states, said that he was confident that “there were no bad feelings, you do not lose friends by coming here” (WikiLeaks 2008).

In the third phase, and up to the present time, according to Pedersen the US has drastically readdressed its preferences towards the Council: from what seemed to be an attempt to let the forum be a second-tier player, to Secretary Clinton’s practical abandonment of the “Arctic Five” experiment, and the 2011 statement that the Arctic Council is “the preeminent forum for international cooperation in the Arctic” (U.S. Department of State 2011). And evidences collected by the two English researchers at the “Royal United Services Institute” (RUSI) Willis and Depledge (2015) and by the “New York Times” correspondent at Kiruna Lee Myers (2013) suggest that the US had a decisive role at Kiruna when, late after dinner, the debate stalled over the EU observership application.

Willis and Depledge have researched the motives behind the outcome of the 2013 Kiruna meeting, and primarily the admission of the Chinese application. In that, they built on interviews with SAOs and representatives of PPs in the months after Kiruna, although they explicitly point out how Canadian officials were not willing to comment on the issue (Willis & Depledge 2015: 28). They find that the common understanding among the diplomats was that the Chinese Arctic ambitions did not pose specific concerns: the informants admitted that not even once in the period 2006-2013 had China’s application for observership been examined in formal talks in separation from the other applications, and they blamed the media for the panicky commentaries of China in the Arctic (Willis & Depledge 2015: 9). Instead, a number of voices, mostly from the Nordic countries and the US, stressed that their countries either had always seen China’s Arctic engagement positively or had no particular reason for opposing the Chinese entry (Willis & Depledge 2015: 9). A representative of ICC Alaska also allegedly praised the fact that China had shown genuine interest in reaching out to the PPs (Willis & Depledge 2015: 9).

What emerges from their study confirms that, most likely, the European application was the single biggest bone of contention between Canada and Russia on the one side, and the rest of the Council on the other side (Myers 2013; Steinberg & Dodds 2015: 109; Willis & Depledge 2015: 28) and that Kerry eventually solved the deadlock by advancing the “entirely enigmatic statement” (Fenge 2013: 45) on the EU contained in the Kiruna declaration.

The impression, then, is that Canada was not particularly alarmed by the East Asian applications per se, but rather that, as far as singular applications were concerned, China was “caught in the reluctance of Canada to extend permanent observer status to the European Union” (Huebert 2012).

For Canada it was more a question of “workability” of the Arctic Council. After the meeting, Aglukkaq stated: “One of my worries is that when we get too many observers, there is a potential to diminish the role of the permanent participants. And the other concern I have is that the number of observers is so big that we won’t be able to host any conferences or meetings in the Arctic” (as quoted in Savage 2013).

And, as the Norwegian researcher Røseth (2014: 843) and the Russian newspaper “Kommersant” (Chernenko 2013) indicated, Russia, and not Canada, held firmer opposition to the Chinese application, ultimately consenting to China’s admission once confronted with the fact that the other member states had reached consensus on this point.

This section has elaborated on the evidences collected in the previous sections, illustrating that, if one were to single out a specific peer pressure exerted on Canada at Kiruna, this seems to be the very case for the US intercession over the EU application, on which Canada was not willing to give way.

With regards to the other applications on the list, Canada was wary rather than strongly contrary. I have argued that Canada was no doubt also influenced – and yet not pressured – by the Nordic countries’ traditional positive attitude towards observers

on the one side, and by what Pedersen (2012) indicates as the American recent re-orientation towards an inclusive Arctic Council on the other side²³.

None of these two factors were specific to Kiruna, even though, as Willis and Depledge report, the frustration among some member states over the reiterated issue of observers was rampant (Willis & Depledge 2015: 27). Overall, concerning the Chinese observership bid, according to the recollection provided by the Canadian historian English: “there was an acceptance, with a small amount of reluctance” (as quoted in Sabin 2013).

5.3 Canada and the observership criteria in the Arctic Council

The following section will look at the institutional component of the international level of my analysis. I argue that Canada was able to act on the institutional structure of the Arctic Council, namely the criteria that regulate the admission of and role of observers, and that this may have been a decisive factor in determining its positive stand towards the East Asian applicants at the meeting in Kiruna.

The “Nuuk criteria”

At the 2009 Arctic Council ministerial meeting in Tromsø, uncertainties among the member states on the role of observers (Canada as an Arctic Power 2012: 6; Graczyk & Koivurova 2014: 233) prevented the Arctic Council from making a decision on the requests for observership, since ministers were “unable to articulate a shared vision on observers” (Canada as an Arctic Power 2012: 6). It seems that this was a common position, and even from the side of the Nordic countries, which have often and more vocally endorsed the admission of new observers (Willis & Depledge 2015: 20). According to Willis and Depledge, then, “certainly Canada and Russia were not prepared to let in all and sundry” (Willis & Depledge 2015: 20). Earlier in April 2009,

²³ Significant is what Secretary Clinton allegedly stated during a meeting on Arctic issues with Canadian Foreign Minister Cannon in 2009: “[Concerning the possible deferral of a decision on new observers at the Council meeting in Tromsø] we need to make clear [...] that this is a postponement not a rejection” (WikiLeaks 2009c).

meeting in Washington with US secretary Clinton with Arctic cooperation on the agenda, Canada's Foreign Minister Cannon had recommended, with regards to new observers, that the Arctic Council discussed "Arctic principles", and articulated Canada's "interest in postponing the entry of new observers and member countries to the Arctic Council" (WikiLeaks 2009c). And, as it emerges from the US notes on the talks, Secretary Clinton agreed: "The Council needs to achieve further agreement on a variety of Arctic issues and that [Clinton] would not object to the postponement of new observers for now" (WikiLeaks 2009c).

Not unexpectedly, then, a new round of discussions on observers at the 2011 Council meeting in Nuuk reportedly revived apprehensions from within the Council (Graczyk 2012: 279). The more immediate concern was that more voices at the table, especially when coming from major non-Arctic players, might hinder the application of the consensus principle that governs the Council process of decision-making (Graczyk & Koivurova 2014: 229). Canada was apparently very adamant on this point, as a Canadian representative at the Nuuk meeting was quoted saying:

"Keeping in mind [the] failed climate conference in Copenhagen – the more members in the club, the harder it is to negotiate something, and there are questions in the Arctic, especially environmental ones that need to be addressed quickly" (Graczyk 2012: 279; Chernenko 2011).

The Canadian alleged statement has been confirmed to me by talks with Canadian officials (that the increased number of participants has been making it difficult to hold Council meetings in many Northern communities) (2015 [interview]) and reflect what the Canadian researcher Chater characterizes as the Canadian unease around observers because of "logistics rather than vital interests", the actual influence of observers on the work of the Council being very well limited (Chater 2015 [interview]). Chater reasons that, in light of the established practice for organizing Council meetings in small centres in the North with, at least for Canada, limited facilities, the risk is that holding the Arctic Council events becomes less manageable. Indeed, writing in October 2014, Exner-Pirot criticized Aglukkaq's initiative to host the 2015 Council

Ministerial meeting in the small Canadian Arctic town of Iqaluit speaking of “logistical horrors” (Exner-Pirot 2014b). But this certainly pleased the locals: closing the Iqaluit meeting in April 2015, Aglukkaq encouraged the participants to visit Iqaluit and get in touch with the residents (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2015b).

A greater number of observers poses even more serious consequences for the PPs and the representation status they enjoy in the Arctic Council (Graczyk & Koivurova 2014: 229), as, although having “full consultation rights” in the negotiations and decisions of the Council, Indigenous participants do not ultimately vote (Arctic Council 2011a). Such insecurities were formulated in official documents from PPs: according to the Arctic Athabaskan Council, for example, the involvement of observers into the Council needed to be defined (AAC 2007), while the Inuit Circumpolar Council specifically questioned what “large nation states such as China and unions such as the European Commission” in the Council could mean for the ICC and how “the large resources that are brought to the table by observers [could] affect ICC’s ability to be heard” (ICC 2010). Mary Simon, former president of the Canadian Inuit Tapirit Kanatami, has summarized the issue as follows:

“The Arctic Council is a consensus organization so corridor discussions are very important sometimes and can influence the formal meeting. So [observers] can have clout” (as quoted in CBC News 2012b).

At stake there are also the national interests of the member states and anxiety about losing their privileged position in the region. In this sense, the application for China has evoked the quite colourful narrative of an Asian “scramble” to the Arctic. A member of the Russian delegation in Nuuk allegedly commented: “If you give them the green light, soon there will be one hundred observers on board, who will gradually require more and more rights, and then insist on turning the Arctic into the “universal humankind heritage” on the model of the Antarctic” (as quoted in Chernenko 2011).

While in Nuuk the observer question was once again deferred, this time the Council seemed more determined to tackle the issue and break the impasse. For instance, the

Danish Chairmanship, taking note of the different views on observers, had decided to distribute a survey among member states and IPOs in an effort to find a common ground (Graczyk 2011: 627). The Arctic Council was then eventually able to agree on the adoption of the recommendation of the SAOs on the criteria for admission and role of observers to the Council (hereinafter “Nuuk criteria”) (Arctic Council 2011b, SAO 2011). The Council resolved to use the new criteria for assessing pending and future applications, and applicants were thus asked to reformulate their bids before the following ministerial meeting of 2013 (Arctic Council 2011b).

This was no doubt a substantial development, given that, as Graczyk and Koivurova have pointed out, much of the unease around new observers originated from that fact that, prior to Nuuk, decisions on new observers were taken amidst an “interpretational space” (Graczyk & Koivurova 2012: 229), and the role of observers was a matter often deemed as inefficiently addressed (Graczyk & Koivurova 2012: 232). As a matter of fact, the only guiding principle in both the 1996 Ottawa declaration and the 1998 Rules of Procedure drafted in Iqaluit was largely discretionary: the Council would evaluate whether applicants could contribute to the work of the Council (Arctic Council 1996; Arctic Council 1998: 7).

Two elements have been identified in the Nuuk criteria (Graczyk & Koivurova 2012: 233). Firstly, the criteria recall and extend the existing rules in that observers ought to accept principles of the Ottawa declaration and demonstrate their “Arctic interests and expertise relevant to the work of the Arctic Council” (SAO 2011: 50). Secondly, and this is an innovation prompted by the PPs’ increased awareness of their political leverage (Graczyk & Koivurova 2012: 233), observers must respect “the values, interests, culture and traditions of Arctic indigenous peoples and other Arctic inhabitants” (SAO 2011: 50).

The Spanish professor Sánchez Ramos has written that some aspects of the “Nuuk criteria” are rather “surprising” (Sánchez Ramos 2013: 269). She focuses on two criteria: that observers shall recognize the sovereignty of the Arctic states and the jurisdiction in the region, and that only the eight Arctic states, with the involvement of

the PPs, are in charge of making decisions. Sánchez Ramos argues that the wording seems redundant considering that respect for the principles of sovereignty is a foundation of International Law, and that the Ottawa Declaration already prescribes the prominence of member states and indigenous participants over observers (Sánchez Ramos 2013: 269). Interesting, she also discusses (Ramos 2013: 269), is the criterion according to which observers cannot surpass the Arctic states in terms of financial contributions to Arctic Council projects (Sánchez Ramos 2013: 269; SAO 2011: 95).

She concludes that these criteria are indicative of a certain “mistrust ” in the observers and their possible influence on the Council (Sánchez Ramos 2013: 269), and, according to Molenaar, they show that “the prevailing perception is not welcoming or inclusive but rather unwelcoming” (Molenaar 2012: 181). In the same way, the Canadian researcher Chater has interpreted the criteria as the product of the Arctic Council member states’ neorealist interpretation of the Council, that is, one that keeps observers as weak actors (Chater 2015: 2).²⁴

Indeed, interviewed in the margins of the meeting in Nuuk, the then Swedish foreign minister Bildt was quite outspoken: “We have agreed on the criteria. But let's be realistic. At the end of the day, members are members, and observers are observers” (as quoted in Willis 2013).

The Kiruna Observer Manual

At the 2013 Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in Kiruna, the green light to observership status to China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Italy and India came together with the formal approval of the “Observer Manual for Subsidiary Bodies”, already announced in Nuuk and introduced by the “Task Force for Institutional Issues” (TFII), but finalised at Kiruna (Arctic Council 2013c; SAO 2011: 78-96). The Manual

²⁴ Chater reaches a conclusion analogous to mine own, namely that the observer criteria firstly serve the purpose of safeguarding the interests of the Council member states and PPs over those of observers, but he builds his discussion against a different theoretical background, that of neorealism (Chater 2015). Specifically he argues that “neorealists, with their tempered expectations of observer influence, best explain the actual importance of observers in the Council” (Chater 2015: 2). However, Chater finds that neoliberal institutionalism has a bigger explanatory power when taking into consideration not only the specific institutional aspect of the criteria, but the general motives behind the Arctic Council’s engagement with observers (Chater 2015: 20).

builds on the existing documents disciplining the role of observers, but goes further in the elaboration of very detailed provisions (Keil 2013; Solli et al. 2013: 256). For instance, after reiterating that “the primary role of observers is to observe” (SAO 2011: 93), the Manual sets out accreditation procedures (“observers may attend meetings and other activities of the Arctic Council, *unless Senior Arctic Officials have decided otherwise*”, the Heads of Delegation of the Arctic States having at any time the discretion to call private meetings (SAO 2011: 94, emphasis added)), access to Arctic Council documents (observers are denied access to documents labelled as “restricted to Arctic States and PPs (SAO 2011: 94)), seating arrangements at meetings (only Arctic states and PPs seat at the main table (SAO 2011: 94)), and speaking order (speakers from Arctic states and PPS have priority (SAO 2011: 95)).

Overall, the inspiration behind the manual seems straightforward: to keep the direction of the Council firmly among member states and PPs (Chater 2015: 2; Sánchez Ramos 2013: 270). Stokke has gone as far as to conclude that under the current rules of procedure, observers have “no formal power or de facto basis for exerting pressure on Council’s decisions” (Stokke 2013: 478).

Canada’s Arctic strategy papers are laconic when it comes to the involvement of non-Arctic states into the institutional framework of the Arctic Council, but it is manifest that Canada views observers as a challenge for the indigenous participants (Graczyk 2012: 272). The “Statement on Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy” significantly reads: “As interest by non-Arctic players in the work of the Council grows, Canada will work to ensure that the central role of the Permanent Participants is not diminished or diluted” (Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy 2010: 22). On a more general level it is also stated that: “The key foundation for any collaboration will be acceptance of and respect for the perspectives and knowledge of Northerners and Arctic states’ sovereignty” (Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy 2010: 22).

Against this background, there appears to be good evidence to argue that Canada and Russia have had a great deal of influence in the process leading to the present configuration of the criteria on observers. While Røseth has made explicit the link

between the strong limitations on observers and Russia's consent on the Chinese application at Kiruna (2014: 845), I argue that such a connection can be made also for the case of Canada. In this sense, according to Sergunin and Konyshev, the "Nuuk criteria" represent the institutionalization of the Canadian and Russian common interpretation of the role of observers in the Arctic Council (Sergunin & Konyshev 2014: 80), and Graczyk concludes that the "Nuuk criteria" seem to be "fully compatible with the Canadian statement" (Graczyk 2013: 277). It is a telling fact that, in a note published shortly after the Ministerial in Nuuk, the then Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov wrote:

"The meeting stated – and this is crucial – the observers' duty to respect the sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction of the Arctic states in the Arctic. Thus the basic 'rules of the game' in the Arctic house will be determined by the Arctic states themselves" (Lavrov 2011).

My impression is, then, that, where Russia's reluctance on new observers is a matter of "Arctic sovereignty" – the apprehension that the Council will lose its "Arcticness" and that more and more players will claim a piece of the "Arctic cake" – Canada has, instead, always insisted more on the "people-first" dimension of the Arctic Council, that is, making sure that the Indigenous participants stayed relevant as the Council was opening up. It is also true that Russia has a quite conflicted experience with its Indigenous Northerners, for example ordering in 2012 the shutdown of the RAIPON, one of the Council Permanent Participants with Russian representation (Sergunin & Konyshev 2014: 74).

Indeed, in 2012, starting the rounds of consultations across Canada's North in preparation of the start of the Canadian Arctic Council chairmanship, Aglukkaq stressed that future applicants for observership must gain "the respect and support of Indigenous peoples in the Arctic region" (as quoted in Bell 2012). And Aglukkaq alluded to a specific Canadian stamp on the "Nuuk criteria" when, speaking on the eve of the summit in Kiruna, she said:

“The criteria that were approved in 2011 in Nuuk, Greenland, said that any country applying must demonstrate respect for the indigenous people’s way of life. *It’s huge for us*” (Savage 2013, emphasis added).

There seems to be agreement that the provision in the Nuuk criteria that lays down the respect for “the values, interests, culture and traditions of Arctic indigenous peoples and other Arctic inhabitants” (Arctic Council 2011b) as a threshold for admission as Arctic Council observers originated as direct reaction to the controversy over the EU ban on seal products (Graczyk & Koivurova 2012: 233), in what may well be taken as Canada’s nod to the “exceptionality of Inuit diplomacy” (Exner-Pirot 2013).

It appears, then, that through the following stages of discussions on observers, Canada acted consistently with the above-mentioned caveat from the “Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy” that aims at safeguarding the Indigenous element of the Council, and thus proceeded guardedly, being willing to accept new observers as long as this provision would find institutionalisation in the Council. And the record of Kiruna also continues in this direction.

Reporting from Kiruna, the Russian newspaper “Kommersant” (2013) anticipated that the Russian delegation headed by Sergey Lavrov was planning to bring to the table the proposal for some well-defined “guidelines” on observers, with particular attention to the fact that none of the applicants would be granted a “permanent” seat (in other words, that the status of observer could be subject to review)²⁵. In the weeks following the Kiruna meeting, after conducting a number of interviews with civil servants from Arctic states working on Arctic governance, Solli et al. found that among the respondents there was a tendency to associate the entry of new observers to the Arctic Council with the adoption of the Manual (Solli et al. 2013: 260), that, as discussed already, reduces the observers to a marginal position within the Council. More

²⁵ While it has become usual to refer to “permanent observers” in opposition to “ad-hoc” observers, it should be clarified that term “permanent” does not hold any official relevance according to the Council. There is actually nothing “permanent” about the observers. As the “Observer Manual” reads: “Observer status continues for such time as consensus exists among Ministers. Any observer that engages in activities which are at odds with the Ottawa Declaration or with the Rules of Procedure will have its status as an observer suspended”(Arctic Council 2013c).

interestingly, Solli et al learned that Canada and Russia had been the most active to push for the Manual during the talks at Kiruna, the other member states either endorsing the initiative or using their support for the Manual to pressure for consensus on the admission of observers (Solli et al 2013: 260). Røseth supports this, but sees Canada as the chief initiator of the document (Røseth 2014: 845). After all, as Fenge has pointed out, as incoming chair of the Council, Canada could count on a good deal of influence on the drafting of the Kiruna declaration (Fenge 2013: 46).

Other indications from the Russian and the Canadian side confirm that getting the Manual through was critical for the two countries. “Kommersant” reports how, among Russian officials, the feeling was that the Manual would grant observers “virtually no voice whatsoever on policy”, to the extent that “the only thing they will be able to do is sit and listen” (Kommersant 2013). For Russia, again, whether accepting new applicants or not came down to restricting as much as possible their influence on the governance of the Arctic Council (Røseth 2014: 845). According to Russian Professor Voronkov: “The change of rules was decisive, and there became no danger in accepting the applicants. Only the Arctic Eight take decisions, and there is no space for other states and international organisations to be involved. It should be called temporary rather than permanent observers, as memberships will be reviewed every fourth year” (as quoted in Røseth 2014: 845).

From the Canadian side, Indigenous PPs are the priority. Notably, speaking for the first time as chair of the Council, Aglukkaq drew an evident connection between the Manual and the PPs:

“We must also make absolutely certain that with the addition of more observers, the role or the voice of the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council is not diminished or diluted in any way. *To this end, I thank Sweden for the work done on the new Arctic Council observer manual.* Clearly defining the role of observers is a very important step toward achieving more certainty and safeguarding the integrity of the Arctic Council” (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2013c, emphasis added).

Indeed, there is agreement on the fact that the admission criteria for observers remarks the saliency of the PPs (Willis & Depledge 2015: 7), and that the PPs were substantially “able to get what they wanted” (Koivurova 2015 [interview]). Specifically for China, and as introduced in chapter 4, Canadian Professor Lasserre has added that, once China accepted the observership criteria set out in Nuuk and then Kiruna, Canadian Indigenous Participants had little ground for rebuffing the Chinese bid (Lasserre 2015, [interview]).

I was able to collect further support for this interpretation from the talks I had with a Danish official (2015 [interview]). The Danish official would not explicitly refer to the role that Russia and Canada had in drafting the Manual at Kiruna, but he did confirm my understanding of the facts by saying that the Nordic countries feel that the Manual is too severe, hoping that the US would start a revision of the criteria under its Council chairmanship (Danish official 2015 [interview]).

At the same time, the Danish official emphasized that the Manual, as any other Arctic Council decision, is the product of a consensual decision among all the member states, and should thus be looked at as a “compromise” (Danish official 2015 [interview]). Fenge too speaks of a “compromise” (2013: 48), and according to English professor Dodds, while Canada and Russia were the “most vexed about observers” (Dodds 2015a [interview]), the fact that the consensus was reached on the criteria indicates that it was a collective effort from all the member states to secure their own interests first. The observer rules evoke Norway’s foreign minister Eide’s statement that “there is no such thing as a free lunch” for observers (as quoted in Milne 2013), since they have signed up to principles of the organization.

Moreover, while Solli et al. have found within the Arctic Council general concerns that very detailed rules could force the work of the Council into a certain institutional rigidity (Solli et al. 2013: 2), it is also true that, outside the more formal SAOs meetings, the Manual is substantially relaxed (AMAP 2015 [interview]); Norwegian official 2015 [interview]). This is especially relevant at the Working Groups level, where the “real work” gets done (AMAP 2015 [interview]).

Other institutional considerations for Canada

Swedish SAO Uexküll has summarized the Council's perspective on the participation of observers in three points: provision of scientific and other expertise, information and financial resources, and enhancement and complementation of the unique and critical role of Permanent Participants (Government of Sweden 2013).

Institution-wise and with regards to Canada, the last point is especially relevant, considering the just-mentioned value that Canada attaches to the participation of the PPs. Indigenous members actually wield great leverage on the work of the Arctic Council: they may, for instance rise to a point of order and propose supplementary agenda items, other than attending to all the meetings and activities of the Council (Arctic Council 2011a). Yet, the lack of financing for their participation to the activities of the Council has been long at stake: as early as 2004, for example, the Icelandic Chairmanship initiated discussions on the PPs' funding arrangements (Government of Iceland 2004). And in 2012, a high-level meeting hosted by the Canadian "Gordon Foundation" concluded, among others, that a severe lack of funding for travel and research resources was hindering the potential of the PPs, and urged Canada to lead a review of the funding mechanism under its Chairmanship (Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation 2012a). As Gamble, Executive Director of "Aleut International Association", a Permanent Participant at the Council, put it: "Bold steps [are] needed to support Indigenous participation at the Arctic Council. Now the pressure is on the Canadian chairmanship" (Gamble 2013).

Therefore, one can make the argument that, in welcoming the East Asian observers, Canada also envisioned the economic benefits that would derive for the PPs. For example, according to Audla, president of the "Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami", observers should "support the work of Arctic nations to respect the participation of indigenous peoples and to encourage greater capacity for participation by indigenous representatives ahead of their own objectives" (as quoted in UK Parliament 2014).

Much of the on-going discussion has made reference to the great importance that Canada attaches to the involvement of Indigenous people in the work of the Council in the institutional form of Permanent Participants.

Speaking at Kiruna in 2013, Aglukkaq stated: “The Indigenous element in the Arctic Council, which Canada worked tirelessly to promote, was trailblazing, as it was one of the first times that governments would sit at the same table with Indigenous organizations on a permanent basis” (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2013c).

And the value of Indigenous participation to the Arctic Council table, as well as Canada’s effort to secure it, is praised by many. English recalls that the Inuit Circumpolar Council was decisive in the process leading to the Council, so that “Indigenous people [...] created the Council (English as quoted in Sabin 2013: 25) and, according to Griffiths (as quoted in Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation 2012b), the constitution of the Arctic Council represented a breakthrough in that it gave permanent seats to Indigenous representatives next to those of the states. Fenge identifies in the advocacy efforts of Indigenous groups part of the reason why the AC originally took on its mandate of sustainable development, other than environmental protection (Fenge 2014: 14). The Canadian Inuit leader Simon had a decisive role in bringing forward the Indigenous instances since the 1980s (English 2013: 50), and the appointment of Aglukkaq as the first Arctic aboriginal resident to chair the Council has been defined “absolutely historical and of major significance” by the vice-chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (as quoted in Savage 2013).

I argue that, institution-wise, Canada was under pressure to accept the East Asian applications that one may define as “structural”, in that it inheres the institution of the Council as a whole. Indeed, since China first presented its application for permanent observership, the admission of powerful non-Arctic states had raised questions around the evolution of Arctic governance and fomented a certain “narrative of the Arctic Council at a crossroads” (Exner-Pirot 2014b; Gregoire 2013)

Graczyk has observed how at the time when the Arctic Council was devised, climate change was not a critical variable in the making of Arctic politics, and global interest in the region had yet to escalate (Graczyk 2012: 265). Therefore, when attention for the Arctic by major non-Arctic actors in the South such as China and South Korea was made official in the form of applications for observership, many feared that the role of observers was not adequately regulated, and could challenge the Council in the future. Indeed, the admission of observers not only involves consequences for the working efficiency of the Council, but it also casts possibly more stringent questions on the strength and legitimacy of the forum; especially in the case of East Asian states, it becomes a matter of choosing between a forum with regional or global relevance (Exner-Pirot 2014b). In this vein, Koivurova (2015 [interview]) and Dodds (2015 [interview]) have agreed that the admission of East Asian states as observers was a necessary development for the Council.

This is the sort of position that, within the Council, was circulating mostly among the Nordic states. The Nordic countries have always been quite adamant on backing the admission of new observers and are thus regarded as the champions of an inclusive Arctic Council (Lunde 2014) (Danish and Norwegian officials 2015 [interview]).

For instance, after the signing of the Kiruna declaration, Norway's foreign minister Eide expressed relief that the long-standing debate about new observers had been solved, and commented that the clout of the Council was now reinvigorated: "I look forward to discussing more important issues for the Arctic, like environment and climate" (as quoted in Karlsbakk 2013). Denmark's Minister for Foreign Affairs Søvndal echoed him, stating: "After this meeting we can proudly state that we have an Arctic Council at its best" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark 2013).

Also, more strongly in the occasion of the Ministerial meeting in Kiruna, and once the line-up of the observership applicants became clear and the Icelandic initiative of the "Arctic Circle" was launched, another concern – that in case of rejection China and other non-Arctic states could look for different venues to follow their Arctic interest – was being voiced (Norwegian official 2015 [interview]). Again, in the words of Eide:

“The argument for opening up for more observers in the Arctic Council is that they will then be a member of our club. Then the danger of them forming their own club will be smaller” (as quoted in Kaiman 2013).

While, at that time, no such comments came from the US, it is interesting to note that, in occasion of the last Ministerial Meeting in Iqaluit, US Secretary of State Kerry stated that “observers make the Arctic Council a truly global enterprise” (Arctic Council 2015a). Significantly, then, the Kiruna declaration clusters the admission of new observers under “strengthening the Arctic Council” (Arctic Council 2013b). According to Sellheim (2012: 132) and Koivurova (2015 [interview]), the aspirations of non-Arctic states to be included in the politics of the Council indicate the increasing legitimacy of the forum.

Finally, there was also for Canada the pressure to “honor” the tradition of the previous Nordic chairmanships of the Council. This consideration was made by some scholars at the Swedish research institute SIPRI:

“Given the transparency and openness that characterized the Swedish chairmanship, together with the Council’s institutional development and acceptance of new observers, the pressure is now on Canada to affirm that the Arctic is headed towards a new stage of multilateral cooperation ” (Berg et al. 2013).

The discussion in section 5.4 has provided considerable substantiation for the “institutional explanation” of Canada’s position on the East Asian observers. Indeed, the criteria of admitting observers, agreed upon in Nuuk in 2011 and in Kiruna in 2013, other than reasserting the centrality of the Arctic Council member states and PPs by setting tough limitations on the role of observers, are remarkably aligned with the Canadian emphasis on Indigenous participation in the Council, a concern specific to Canada. It appears, then, that the particular formulation of the rules was pivotal in overcoming Canada’s uncertainties about the East Asian applicants at Kiruna. Overall, the neoliberal institutionalist interpretation of international institutions – international institutions bring together states with “mutuality of interests” (Axelrod & Keohane 1985: 235) and allow for common payoffs from cooperation without the states having

to put their national interests aside – is evident in the criteria, both in the proximity of the Manual to Canada’s own national preferences for securing the relevance of the Indigenous PPs in the Council, and that the criteria respond to the collegial concern of all the Arctic Council member states.

5.4 Summary and implications

This chapter has focused on the international level of my analysis. Following the premises that neoliberal institutionalism poses with regards to the possibilities for international cooperation – international institutions are not brittle initiatives born out of power politics, but states will produce durable multilateral efforts because they realize the prospect of long-term mutual benefits without having to concede on their national interests – I have discussed interests and institutions behind Canada’s decision at Kiruna.

As for Canada’s circumpolar interests, I have found that the admission of East Asian observers is just the last step in Canada’s positive reorientation towards multilateralism in Arctic relations. I have also concluded that at the international level the continuity between Canada’s diplomatic tradition on the circumpolar stage and the outcome of Kiruna is greater than one would conclude by taking into consideration only Canada’s domestic politics on the Arctic. In other words, from the beginning, Canada’s international position on the East Asian applicants was by no means comparable to the case of the European observership bid, on which Canada put a veto. With regards to the East Asian applications, for Canada it boils down to concerns for the effects that “opening up” the Council to powerful non-Arctic states such as China may have on the organisational capability of the Arctic Council and the voices of the Permanent Participants. This is in line with the value that Canada has traditionally attached to the Indigenous component of its Arctic policy and that emerges as early as 2010 in the “Statement on Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy”. The revision of the criteria on the role and admission of observers substantially solved Canada’s concerns. Significantly, I have found that it was the EU’s application, and not the East Asian ones, to polarize the discussions at Kiruna. Harper’s Canada’s international

“negotiating flexibility” (Putnam 1988: 445) on the issue of East Asian observers in the Council has thus traditionally been larger – that is, a clearly more positive stance – than from a domestic point of view, where, as chapter 3 has shown, Harper’s narrative on the Arctic has been a parochial one.

As for the “institutional explanation”, I have argued that the particular formulation of the rules on observers and, more significantly, Canada’s active role in advancing them, was a determinant component of Canada’s decision at Kiruna.

6 Conclusions

In this final chapter I will summarize my research and its main findings (section 6.1), I will discuss which factors were most important in leading Canada to consent to the admission of the East Asian observers (section 6.2), and I will present the implications that can be drawn from the findings (section 6.3).

6.1 Summary and main findings

This thesis has considered the research question: *Why did Canada join the consensus decision on the East Asian observership applications at the 2013 Arctic Council meeting in Kiruna?* I have built on Putnam and Milner and I have broken my analysis down into three chapters: chapters 3 and 4 look at Canada's domestic politics, while chapter 5 looks at international relations in the Arctic and more specifically the Arctic Council. The twofold structure of interests and institutions that I have introduced in chapter 2 has been kept at both levels of analysis.

In chapter 3 I applied Putman's and Milner's concepts of interests of domestic actors and their assumptions on the relation between domestic interests and international cooperation to Canada's national politics on the Arctic. I have found that the preferences of Harper's executive and its leading ambition to stay in power explain why, at least for the first half of Harper's mandate, domestic politics may have limited Canada's international win-sets on the issue of East Asian observers in the Arctic Council. Specifically, Harper's very nationalistic understanding of the North prevented domestic politics from "opening up" to theme of circumpolar multilateralism. Chapter 3 also pointed to Harper's more recent toning down of his rhetoric on the Arctic – both as a result of general electoral concerns and the growing unease of Northerners at the government's bellicose take on the Arctic – concluding that this may have expanded Canada's spectrum of international win-sets with regards to discussions in the Arctic Council on the admission of new observers.

Chapter 4 has continued with the analysis of Canada's domestic level by investigating whether Putnam and Milner's argument that domestic institutions can influence a country's direction in foreign policy by letting certain interests prevail over others, could hold for the institutional process of devolution underway in Canada's North. My hypothesis was that devolution may relate to the observer issue in that, by preparing the institutional setting for investments in the North, would serve the government's neoliberal economic strategy for the North that builds on foreign investments, also from East Asia, and that it thus interested in having the East Asian countries sit at the Arctic Council.

By presenting the Conservatives' economic plans for Canada's Arctic, the dimensions of the current East Asian engagement in the development of Canada's North, and the institutional implications of devolution, I have found that, while the government is clearly oriented towards exploiting the natural potential of the North, and reaching out to East Asian players, and possibly benefitting from the East Asian observership in the Council, unlocking the economic possibilities of the North is happening today through the establishment of economic programs such as CanNor rather than devolution. In fact, it appears that devolution has added complexity to the institutional panorama of the North.

In the end, through the lens of neoliberal institutionalism, I have investigated interests and institutions at the international level behind Canada's stand at Kiruna. As for interests, I have identified the neoliberal institutionalist interpretation of cooperation in Canada's positive re-evaluation of the benefits of multilateralism in Arctic relations, including increased ties with East Asian states through observership in the Council. As for international institutions, I have found that the revision of new observership criteria, for which Canada was at the frontline, was an important driver behind Canada's decision on the East Asian observers at Kiruna.

6.2 Which factors can best explain Canada's position on the East Asian observers at Kiruna?

Having summarized the main findings of my research, in this section I will merge domestic and international levels and I will weight against each other the evidences that I have collected. The aim is to identify which factor(s) was more decisive in directing Canada's decision at Kiruna.

A reasonable starting point is that, of all of the factors at both domestic and international level interacting at Kiruna, I will look first at those that in my research exhibited the greater degree of variation in the timespan leading up to the Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in Kiruna, and that in my study coincides with the years 2006 (Harper takes office) – May 2013. In doing so, I ask whether the more a certain factor has changed over time, the stronger the significance for the dependent variable at study (Canada's decision at Kiruna). The more remarkable variation I have found with regards to the institutional process of devolution in Canada's North and to the evolution of the observership criteria in the Arctic Council.

Devolution has progressed significantly under the Conservatives, and while the premises of devolution – among others, clearer definitions of the stakeholders in the North – can be, in principle, put in relation with easier conditions for investments, also from East Asia – I have argued that it is too premature to conclude so. It appears that for the time being, devolution, by acting on the institutional setting of Northern Canada that is undergoing a parallel evolution with Aboriginal self-governance, has in fact complicated the situation for investments. Therefore, devolution should not be considered determinant for the Canadian decision at Kiruna.

On the contrary, the new criteria regulating the admission of observers, as revised at Nuuk and Kiruna, seem to have been critical for Canada's consent on admission of the East Asian applicants, appeasing in particular Canada's concern that the saliency of the Indigenous participants at the Council would not be reduced by an "enlarged" Arctic Council. Moreover, as I have discussed, Canada itself had an active role in the review of the rules.

Two other factors support this finding, although their change over time is less clear-cut than for the observership criteria, and they thus should be considered as catalyst, rather than determinant, elements. On the one side, more importantly, Canada's direction of foreign policy, as delineated by official documents and diplomatic practices, has moved in the last few years towards the appreciation of circumpolar cooperation (a development that has not occurred as manifestly as the revision of the observer criteria). This is particularly relevant since it happened even when Arctic circumpolar cooperation was absent from Harper's domestic narrative on the Arctic with its aggressive "use it or lose it" rhetoric. Also, I have clarified how Canada's cautionary attitude on the entry of East Asian observers should not be mistaken for opposition.

On the other side, Harper's domestic agenda has largely eschewed its original bellicose approach to the Arctic and has been diversified to include the theme of economic growth for the North. While this has been in itself a promising development, and one that bridges Canada's Arctic international and domestic politics, Harper's long practice of shaping politics surrounding the Arctic in order to reach electoral consensus casts doubts on the actual significance of such a factor in answering my research question.

One last dimension that has increased through time is the pressure on Canada from the Arctic Council peer member states on the admission of new applicants. Once resolved, the issue of new observers strengthened the legitimacy of the Council. However, I have concluded that such a pressure played out more clearly on the issue on which Canada was most unwilling to relent and come to any discussions, namely the EU's observership bid. As a consequence, peer pressure should not be taken as a decisive dynamic in the process leading to Canada's positive stand on the East Asian observers, even though I have discussed that it certainly helped.

Finally, one factor that has remained constant over the years is Harper's investment-driven economic plans for the North, aimed at opening up the energy potential of the region and framing the Arctic as an economic opportunity. My analysis has shown that the implementation of such policies lays very high in the government's agenda.

Canada's dependency on foreign capitals, together with increased diplomatic ties with China – Canada's second largest trading partner – and the desire for improved relations with other East Asian countries (not only economic, but also, for example, in the field of polar research), are likely to have contributed an important dimension to the explanation of Canada's acceptance of the East Asian observers in the Arctic Council. Indeed, I have found that the framework of the Council may give momentum to these relations.

In conclusion, the combination of new observership criteria – in the drafting of which Canada played an influential role – that builds on Canada's general reorientation towards circumpolar multilateralism and cooperation within the Arctic Council, and economic considerations on the involvement of East Asian countries in the development of Canada's North, explain Canada's consent to the admission of the East Asian observers at the 2013 Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in Kiruna.

6.3 Implications of the main findings

Having summarized the main findings of my thesis, I now briefly pinpoint two orders of implications of my study.

Firstly, my findings validate Putnam's and Milner's models, and the bigger tradition they fall into that incorporates the domestic and international levels in the study of certain incidents of a country's foreign policy, and, for the part that has been of more relevance for my analysis, consider how dynamics of domestic politics may affect the likelihood of international cooperation.

In the case of my research, dealing with Canada's domestic and international politics has been fundamental for obtaining a well-rounded understanding of the process leading to Canada's acceptance of East Asian states as observers in the Arctic Council. Other than explanatory findings, as the one summarized in the two sections above, that is, the drivers behind Canada's decision at Kiruna, the result of my research has also a

significant descriptive aspect, in that I challenge that literature that portrays Harper's Canada as substantially opposed to new observers in the Arctic Council.

Indeed, had I ignored Harper's domestic electoral game and focused only on the international politics of the Arctic, I would have missed much of the substance that lays at the base of Canada's perceived reluctance on having new non-Arctic players admitted in the Council and that is, as I have found, to a large extent driven by electoral calculations. With the findings at Canada's domestic level in mind, I have been able to look at Canada's actions on the international level and collect a more promising picture of Canada's engagement with circumpolar cooperation than the one at Canada's national level. I can thus say that skipping the link between Canada's domestic and international Arctic politics has caused a number of (mostly non-Canadian) commentators (Keil 2011; Lunde 2014; Pulkinnen 2013) to exaggerate Canada's opposition to the East Asian observers and conclude, for example, that Canada was dragged into grudgingly consenting to the admission of East Asian observers.

Secondly, my findings suggest that the issue of governance in the Arctic and in the Arctic council is to remain a thorny one in the years to come, but one that is going to come back to the attention of Arctic experts rather than being translated into excitable headlines for the general public, given that China and other major non-Arctic stakeholders are now "part" of the Council. And in this vein the case of observers is particularly telling. While at Kiruna in 2013, discussions on the admission of the observers took up most of the energy of the ministers and their delegates pushing the talks until late at night, it seems that at the last Ministerial meeting in Iqaluit in April 2015, the issue was barely touched upon or blatantly ignored. While the Arctic Council produced a comparatively longer final declaration on the entry of new applicants (among the state applicants were allegedly: Greece, Turkey, Mongolia and Switzerland) it was merely stated that:

"[The Arctic Council ministers] acknowledge the positive contributions of Observers to the work of the Council, instruct the Senior Arctic Officials to further guide the

Council's engagement with Observers, taking into account contributions to date and opportunities for future collaboration, and defer decisions on pending Observer issues with the goal of deciding on them at the Ministerial Meeting in 2017” (Arctic Council 2015: 5).

Interestingly, the need for further regulations on the engagement of observers seems to be again (at least formally) behind the new deferral of observership applications, and my thesis has gone a long way in discussing the institutional evolution of the criteria for observers and their implications for the governance of the Arctic Council.

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Appendix 1 List of respondents

Name of respondent	Title	Date of interview	In person/by email/by telephone
Alexander Sergunin	Professor, St. Petersburg State University, Russia	18.03.2015	In person
Andrew Chater	PhD Candidate, Western University, Canada	22.02.2015	By telephone
Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP)	-	05.05.2015	In person
Canadian Officials working on Arctic issues	Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Canada	18.02.2015	In person
Danish Official working on Arctic issues	Minister of Foreign Affairs, Denmark	03.04.2015	By telephone
Frédéric Lasserre	Professor, Laval University, Québec,	03.04.2015	By email

	Canada		
Greg Poelzer	Professor, University of Saskatchewan, Canada; Executive Chair International Centre for Northern Governance and Development	03.04.2015	By telephone
Heather Nicol	Professor, University of Toronto, Canada	08.04.2015	By email
Klaus Dodds	Professor, Royal Holloway University, London, UK	05.05.2015	By email
Marc Lanteigne	Senior Research Fellow at Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)	22.03.2015	In person
Michael Byers	Professor, Canada Research Chair in Global Politics and International Law, University of British Columbia, Canada	18.03.2015	In person

Norwegian Official working on Arctic issues	Stortinget, Oslo, Norway	10.02.2015	In person
Terry Fenge	Ottawa-based consultant specializing in Arctic, environmental, and Aboriginal issues	18.03.2015	In person
Timo Koivurova	Research Professor; Director of the Northern Institute for Environmental and Minority Law, Arctic Centre/University of Lapland	05.04.2015	By email
Wilfrid Greaves	PhD candidate, University of Toronto, Canada	03.03.2015	By telephone

Appendix 2 Map of Canada



Source: Government of Canada (2002)